The
UNVEILING

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Dedicated to
THE WOMEN OF IRAN
whose valued friendship through twenty-five years
has made my own life richer and fuller and
the writing of this book a possibility.
G. V. P.

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Author's Note

ALL THE CHARACTERS of this book, with the exception of Riza Shah Pahlavi, and the Yezdi, are fictitious. The inspection as related by His Majesty, the former shah of Iran, is authentic. The martyrdom of the Yezdi in Mecca is a true account of an actual event which occurred in 1943 A.D. The other incidents had their duplicates in actuality, but are not related in any manner to any living persons.

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CHAPTER 1

IT WAS SPRING IN IRAN. IN THEIR GARDEN IN KASHAN, THE family of the Mujtahid were having tea. March, 1917, meant that wars were raging in Europe, but in Kashan, according to the Mohammedan calendar, it was the month of Farvardin of the year 1295, and conflicts on distant battlefields did not disturb the tranquillity of the Mujtahid's teatime.

The garden, protected from prying eyes by high mud walls, was a gem of quiet beauty, its facets catching and reflecting many colors. In its center the blue-tiled pool formed a limpid oval extending from the paved space in front of the main residence halfway to the door in the mud wall. A drooping willow near the door screened the pool from casual callers and beds of flowers bordered the graveled path to its cement abutment — forget-me-nots that echoed the blue of the tiles, yellow pansies that seemed to reflect the glint of gold from fishes swimming lazily in its clear water.

Seated on a large Kashan rug in front of the house, the family watched the pouring of their tea. The Mujtahid, a religious teacher of Islam, looked at his daughters, seven-year-old Esmat and five-year-old Soroor, stringing necklaces from the blossoms of a yellow jasmine bush, as he sipped his tea from a saucer. He turned to his wife. "Isn't it time Esmat learned to weave?" he asked.

"So it is!" the plump dark-eyed Fatima exclaimed. "I was just her age when I began to weave. That first rug was part of my dowry too."

Baji, the older woman serving them, spoke up, "It is time she began while her fingers are supple enough to tie the knots

tightly and quickly."

" She will have to acquire patience. Weaving a rug is good for that," said the Mujtahid.

The younger serving-woman near the shining brass samovar laughed. " Patience is all very well, but she has to learn to sit high on a timber and not fall off too."

" But I won't have time to play! " cried Esmat, dropping her necklace and running to her mother.

" Play! " echoed Baji. " A big girl like you cannot play all day."

" But I don't! " cried Esmat. " The teacher, my mirza, comes. I have to read the Koran. And I have to pray. I don't want to work all the time. I want to play with Soroor."

Fatima looked at her husband. " The child is right. Sometimes she must play."

" We have no need to hurry her," the Mujtahid replied. " You will help her, Naneh." He turned to the serving-woman. " Two years, three years, what difference does it make? Do not hurry her, but see that she weaves a pair of rugs for her dowry that she will always be proud of."

" What design do you like best? " Fatima asked Esmat. " The Garden? The Shah Abbas? "

" The Tree of Life! " cried Esmat. " The Tree of Life, with the nightingales in the branches and the blue sky! Just like the one you and grandmother wove in Kerman."

" Order the wool and the patterns," said the Mujtahid. " Set up the loom in the storage room beside the pool." Then, rising majestically, he left the garden. His part of the new rugs was finished.

It was little Esmat who watched the room prepared for her weaving: saw the heavy uprights of timber embedded in cement in the mud floor, saw the crossbars to hold the strings of the loom made rigid, and the strings themselves wound round and round them; saw the seat plank placed in position, the cross sections of her chosen design and the many colors of wool laid in readiness. It was Esmat who counted the days until everything was finished and her new teacher appeared in her father's garden.

Then, day after day, Esmat was ordered to stop her play, to leave the bright garden for the work on the loom. At first, she did not mind; it was interesting to watch the design unfold before her. But when her teacher said: "You must work faster, and faster; you must tie your knots tighter, much tighter. You will be an old woman before you finish," Esmat rebelled and sought sympathy from her mother and Naneh, her nurse. But her mother laughed and said she would soon learn; all the girls of Kashan became expert weavers. Nevertheless, she instructed Naneh to work with her awhile, then let her play again.

So each morning Esmat sat cross-legged on the wooden plank before the loom, but in the afternoons she played with her little sister and small brothers. Sandwiched in between were her lessons. When the old mirza taught her, her childish voice rolled out the guttural Arabic of the Koran with such feeling it was hard to realize she did not comprehend the meaning in the least. But she learned reverence for the Koran; she learned how to perform her ablutions each time the call to prayer came; and she imitated her mother's genuflections perfectly, muttering under the small house veil she wore for her prayers the Arabic she had memorized. She learned to write Persian script and to work simple sums with the aid of her father's abacus. She memorized poems from Saadi and Hafiz and read tales of the shahs of Iran.

The seasons came and went, bringing feasts and fastings, times of mourning and times of rejoicing, all decreed by Islam, the religion of state. And all the while, silently, slowly, the pair of rugs grew.

Time passed; there was no need for hurry, said Esmat's father.

Why should there be hurry? Did the seasons alter their rhythm or grains and fruits hasten their ripening? Even the streams from the far mountains seldom hurried across the wide plains to Kashan. Why should there be change in Iran? Men, women, and children were the same today as in the times of their forefathers. Life and its customs and superstitions had not altered since Mohammed had brought them the religion of Islam and the sword of Islam had divided all men in three

groups: first, those in whose veins the blue blood of the Prophet ran rich, entitling them to wear the sacred color, green, and the insignia of their religion; second, the military group ordained to protect and preserve the state's rulers; and last, the insignificant merchants, mechanics, and day laborers, the common men of Iran, who were of little importance.

The women and girls beneath the chuddar, the black veil of Islam, were of no importance whatsoever.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, little unimportant Esmat continued her weaving as her mother and grandmother had done before her, until her pair of rugs lay at last on the floor, their trees rising up from the borders, the nightingales cocking their eyes from the branches, the clear blue of the sky unmarred by faulty dyeing, the ground flowers blooming gaily, the intricate border a perfect frame repeating and unifying color and design. Three years she had worked on her task, years in which she had grown from a little girl to a slender maiden.

" My rugs! " cried Esmat. " My very own rugs! " Her eyes sparkled with pleasure and pride through the small aperture of her house veil which covered her from forehead to ankles.

When the master designer had left, after snipping off the uneven nap, the rugs were declared perfect and the pair were hung in the big reception room. Friends and relatives who examined them turned with new respect in their eyes to note how the Mujtahid's daughter had grown. For families seeking mates for their young men looked well to the accomplishments of the girl they selected. A pair of rugs hanging in the home of the Mujtahid was a real asset in Kashan.

Esmat's father looked at her speculatively one day. " You might receive offers of marriage for her," he said to Fatima. " An engagement at her age is not bad; she will enjoy working on her dowry. Thank God, we have no need to hurry her; one year, two years, three years from now is time enough to change from a girl to a bride."

So, as the months passed, the *khastigars,* the women bride seekers, approached the family of the Mujtahid with offers of marriage. It was Ramazan, the Month of Fasting, when Esmat

was led to the threshold of a new life with a new pattern that her parents and custom had designed for her. The wife of the master rug designer of Kashan had come to the home of the Mujtahid seeking her as a wife for her son Nosrat.

Ramazan, the Month of Fasting, turns night into day and, for those who can adjust themselves to its new routine, day into night. Night is the time one visits one's friends, for then it is permissible to eat and drink; only in the daytime does the law for fasting hold. Since sleep makes the hours of hunger and thirst pass more quickly, everyone spends long hours of the day sleeping.

Since she was now eleven years old, Esmat was observing the fast with her parents. She remembered with shame, though, the first year she had tried to keep it; she had succumbed to thirst one day, hiding behind the big water jar and drinking deeply from the open basin that caught its drippings. But her mother had seen her and punished her so severely that she never forgot it. Since that time she began the fast earlier each year and kept it longer than the rest of the family to atone for her past failure, even though the kindly Mujtahid had assured his daughter that no child of nine was expected to fast!

This year she observed the period of fasting as strictly as possible. Eleven years old meant that it was time to become engaged — and she had been told that a visit from a young man was expected the next evening. She might peek at him from behind the door if she wished!

Esmat thought the time would never pass until evening of the next day. During the long, hot hours, when food and drink were not permitted, she tried to study and pray, only to find herself dozing when she studied and longing for water while she prayed. But finally she heard the call to prayer from the minarets of the Mosque and the sound of the gun announcing the end of that day's fast. After the men of the family had surfeited themselves with the rich food and drink, the women ate their fill, and the balance was borne to the cross and hungry servants in the kitchen.

Then, radiant, Esmat assisted the women servants in preparing the reception room for guests. Before each chair small

tea tables stood loaded with special Ramazan sweets: the spun sugar candy, the candied okra, the elephant's-ears, the sugar tubes filled with honey. Naneh brought in the Turkish water pipes, with geranium petals floating in their glass bottoms, and placed them before the seats where the men would take their places.

Finally, Esmat heard the bustle and confusion of the customary greetings and the sound of the men seating themselves with the Mujtahid and his relatives. When all was quiet within, Naneh motioned to the girls awaiting her signal in the garden. Esmat and Soroor hid themselves behind the curtains that separated the reception room and their father's study; then Naneh opened the curtains a crack through which they might peep at the guests. Esmat saw several middle-aged men but only one young, olive-skinned man, with a green turban wound around his head. *He must be the one,* she thought. *I'm glad he isn't old — he can't be more than ten years older than I am.* She saw that he had a mustache and a beard, like her father, and the turban signified that he must be of the blood of the Prophet.

The men began smoking and Naneh dropped the curtain, indicating that the girls must leave. Silently they stole from their hiding places into the garden of the women's quarters.

" By the holy prophets! " said Naneh appreciatively. " He's a fine young man."

Soroor giggled. " He's too old to suit me. Did you see his beard and mustache? It would tickle you, Esmat! "

But Esmat did not answer. Instead she sat down by the pool and let her hand fall into the cool water. For years she had been told that one day she would marry a young man of her parents' choice, a man correctly trained in the religion of Islam, and faithful in the fulfillment of its every detail — someone like her own father perhaps, said her mother. She was not to expect a prince of beauty or stature; his religion was more important. Her father would know about that, said her mother, as he would know everything else about him.

So the tales Naneh had told her of handsome young men who would seek her hand had formed only a background for

her own picture of a suitor who would sublimate all else to Islam and the commands of the Prophet. She had dreamed of becoming a bride, of the pretty clothes and the honors that would be hers, but it had mattered little whether her husband was handsome or ordinary-looking; the man chosen by her parents would be right for her.

Soroor and Naneh were whispering eagerly together. In the midst of the whispers Soroor yawned and Naneh ordered the two girls to bed.

Soroor sleepily obeyed, but Esmat begged for one more look at the young man. " I'll only stay a moment and then I'll come right to bed," she promised. Urging extreme caution, Naneh followed her to the doorway, showed her how to hold the curtains, and then she and Soroor tiptoed off to the *anderun.*

Esmat waited until she could no longer hear their footsteps, then carefully parted the drapery. The scene had changed. The men, smoking and eating, had grown friendly and the young man had removed his turban and was holding it on his knees. His thick black hair gave him a more boyish look, but in her shock Esmat did not notice that. *A man of Islam had removed his sacred turban!* Again and again she had overheard her father tell his pupils that the turban, the emblem of Islam, must never be taken from their heads save in the privacy of their own homes.

All her lessons in Moslem ritual rose like a flaming sword of warning before her. This man had committed a sin she could neither forget nor forgive. Shocked beyond words, she crept from her hiding place and hurried to the women's rooms, where she hid herself under the thick comforter and pretended to sleep.

It seemed hours later when she heard her father come in and begin discussing the callers with her mother. Apparently the men of the household had been well satisfied with the evening, but no one spoke to Esmat, feigning sleep beneath the quilted covers. It was not until the before-dawn call for prayer awakened them all that her parents told her it had been arranged for her to be the bride of Nosrat, the rug designer's son.

Esmat's face, pale from lack of sleep, grew even paler and

her eyes darker as she answered, " Heaven forbid that I should ever be his bride! "

Her father and mother looked at each other uneasily. Had Esmat worked too hard at her lessons? Had the years of weaving so sapped her strength that the fasting had demented her?

" What do you mean? " asked the Mujtahid. " What I say, you do."

Esmat dared not meet his scowling glance. Twisting her house veil nervously, she repeated her statement and fled sobbing to the garden. Refusing to discuss the matter with his wife, her father sought retreat in his study. But Soroor had overheard the scene and hurried to relate it to Naneh, who came at once to her mistress for verification.

Fatima sought to blame Naneh for prejudicing Esmat when she let her peek at the young man. But Soroor cleared Naneh of her mother's accusations.

" You should never have let her return to look at him a second time," said Fatima, grasping at this error.

" She didn't say a thing against him! How could I know there was any reason back of it? " She threw her hands upward in a gesture of despair, saying as she turned to leave the room: " Allah alone can tell why she does some things! I never could understand."

" Let it be," said her mother. " But try to find out why she did it; then maybe we can convince her of her mistake."

But, say what they would, they could not persuade Esmat to change her mind. Nor would she tell them why she would not marry Nosrat. " They will think I am not serious," she reasoned within herself.

That evening she took Soroor and Hassan, her little brother, to the water cistern. It was very difficult to lift the heavy wooden door covering the cistern, but she struggled until she succeeded. Then she forced her reluctant sister and brother to look into the watery depths. " I'll drown myself if I am forced to marry that man! " she told them.

The children gazed fearfully into the forbidden cistern and then ran excitedly to their mother with the tale.

Now the women of the household whispered of Esmat's

sanity. They feared her threats — had not others made similar threats and carried them out? They agreed that she was young, that she had been fasting too long, that perhaps some devil had entered into her and was making her do this strange thing. " She will forget," said they.

Yet she did not, she could not, she would not forget. Month after month passed and many were the interviews between her mother and Nosrat's mother, but Esmat would not yield. If a young man would remove his turban in a place and a manner which bemeaned it, he might forget to say his prayers, or fast, or give to the poor, or take the pilgrimages commanded by the Koran. If he did this, not only he but his entire family would be endangered. She could not afford to risk her soul, her hopes of eternity. She would not yield. Nosrat's unorthodox removal of his turban had erected an insuperable barrier in her mind.

Finally, the family of Nosrat ceased to seek the daughter of the Mujtahid for their son. They turned elsewhere, and soon the daughter of a prominent rug merchant welcomed the prospective bridegroom.

It was long before mothers of other eligible sons came to the Mujtahid's home, for rumor had spread that Esmat was unwilling to marry at all. She was nearly fourteen before her mother and father again welcomed the *khastigars*. The Mujtahid felt they had been a little premature the first time; he often watched Esmat as she lifted her slender arms when she prayed, and sighed as he saw nature's signs of maturity unfolding their soft curves on her girlish figure. He must find someone for her — some son of his friends who would, he hoped, be worthy of her.

Esmat had learned to sew and her embroidery and drawn work were painstakingly exquisite. She had learned to cook and to direct the women in the seasoning of special dishes and in making the many delicious candies that delighted Persian women when they came to the Mujtahid's home for tea. There were differences of opinion as to the marriageability of a girl Esmat's age — some women said she was now too old to make an obedient daughter-in-law; some said that she would require less training to make her useful in the home. All agreed on one

point: that a girl as religious as she would be far superior to some other religiously indifferent maiden.

It was the winter before she was fifteen that Esmat saw, from her position behind the curtain, a suitor who interested her. He was a little older than Nosrat, perhaps, but his seyid's turban remained on his head and his dignified manner won the respect of the hidden girl.

She had made no comment when her mother told her that the young man's mother would call the following day. Although she did not join in the conversation, she served them tea deftly and was secretly pleased with this obviously very religious woman, who rose to say her prayers when the evening calls sounded over the city. Afterward she spoke to Esmat and Fatima of her son, Ali, telling how he kept all the fasts, how he regularly gave to the beggars at the roadside, and, most important of all, how he planned to follow in the footsteps of his father and become a priest of Islam. His father, Esmat knew, was the Motavali of the Shrine, a man entrusted with the care of the properties belonging to the Shrine.

Esmat's mother replied in kind, reminding her guest that her daughter had kept the fasts since she was nine years old; that she had spent many hours in prayer during the Holy Days of Mourning in Moharram; she told of how hoarse Esmat had become because of her weeping and wailing during the passion play, the tragedy of the death of Hasan and Husain, revered martyrs of Islam.

Esmat listened silently to the recital, watching her mother for the nod that indicated she was to remove the teacups and pass the fruit to their guest. Her nimble fingers pared the oranges, leaving just enough of the skin attached so that the daintly separated sections lay like the petals of an open flower. Then a glance from her mother dismissed her.

According to custom, she posted herself behind the closed door and heard herself discussed still further. She smiled as she heard her mother say she never was ill.

" She has had malaria," the guest objected. " Only recently I heard she was sick."

" Oh, that! Who considers malaria? Does not everyone in

Kashan have it? "

The visitor admitted the truth of this statement and changed the subject to a discussion of the household articles that Esmat would bring to the home of her husband. When an agreement was reached that suited both women, they discussed the marriage portion. The Motavali's wife thought this much too large, but Esmat's mother had orders from the Mujtahid, who had decreed that it was to be no less than three thousand tomans, forfeit if the young man divorced his wife because he tired of her.

It was long before Esmat heard what she had been waiting for: she was wanted as a bride for Ali. Then she stole away to her favorite seat by the pool and dreamily watched the fish swimming into the shadows cast by the drooping willow tree.

CHAPTER 2

SLOWLY THE RIM OF THE FULL JUNE MOON CREPT OVER THE wall of the Mujtahid's garden. The stars still shone from deep wells of blue sky and their reflections glistened in the quiet pool under the willow tree. Soon the radiance of the moon dimmed them to mere sparks of light and the willow changed from a bouquet of drooping shadows to a dark silhouette outlined by cobwebs of silver as the moon rose higher and higher.

It was the beginning of summer, and this was the night Esmat was to leave her father's home and her girlhood days forever.

In the big room of the *anderun,* Esmat, enveloped in a soft silken prayer veil that covered her wedding dress and made her beauty almost nunlike, sat with a few quiet maidens and elderly women awaiting the summons from the bridegroom. There was a certain wistfulness in her waiting, an unspoken pleading for love from the man who was to uncover her face that night.

Suddenly the door opened and her father appeared. Sitting down beside his daughter, he silently took her hand. As she turned toward him she was surprised to find tears in his eyes.

" My dear father, why do you weep? "

" It is nothing," said he gruffly. " I only want you to know that I love you and pray that you may be happy." Gently he took her in his arms and kissed her, then rose, and abruptly left.

Esmat watched his dignified figure departing, wondering that he should weep this night when she had never seen tears in his eyes before. She herself did not feel like weeping, though she was afraid, afraid of the moment when her veil would be lifted and Seyid Ali would look long into her face. Carefully she wiped her father's tear from her cheek; nothing must mar her

powdered beauty this night.

There was a knocking at the door, a rush of feet to open it, a cry from the group near the gate: " The bridegroom has sent his relatives and the certificate of marriage for his bride! "

Trembling with excitement, Esmat rose while the women crowded about her; one removed the silk veil; one bade her step into her black street chuddar; another adjusted the horsehair screen over her forehead and eyes. Her mother kissed her on both cheeks, then watched her daughter and her maiden friends follow the large mirror which the servants were carrying out of the door. Each girl held a lighted candle in a glass-globed holder, and as they moved down the narrow street, it seemed as if a bed of tulips were glowing, animated, filling the night with beauty.

Through lane after lane, the group from the home of the groom and the one from the home of the bride wound their way. Always the mirror, carefully carried by the two menservants, reflected the bright lights of the candles and the black-veiled figure in their midst. Slowly they approached the door of the Motavali's garden. The mirror, tilted to permit its passage within, caught the stars, then the trees, and once more the bride in its silvery depths as she entered the garden and moved toward the women's quarters.

Just as she crossed the threshold, a man kneeling beside the watercourse, holding a struggling lamb, cut its throat. There was a sigh as its breath escaped and its blood spurted into the waterway. Its lifeless form quivered and started, shook and lay still, a sacrifice for the happiness of the new bride. Esmat noted it with satisfaction. What evil could follow her into her new home while the lamb's blood protected the entrance?

At the foot of the steps she paused while her women hurriedly removed her black silk veil and adorned her with the bridal veil of lace and its orange-blossom wreath. Over all went her sheer white semicircular veil, and she again followed the mirror up the steps to the porch and across the hall to the wedding guests.

Her aunt, who had entered with Esmat, stepped forward and spoke to the bridegroom's relatives. " Where is the bride-

groom? Let him welcome us."

Seyid Ali came forward and with downcast eyes took his place beside Esmat. He smiled self-consciously, placed his hand on his heart, and bowed to the roomful of women, paying no attention to the young bride at his side.

As the young couple were led to the seats of honor, the music of the mandolin, the guitar, and the drum began. Tightly veiled women studied the young couple with interest. After a few minutes, the bridegroom arose, excused himself with a low bow, and left the room. His exit was the signal for her aunt to remove the extra veil from Esmat's head and for the rest of the women to throw aside their own veils so that they might laugh and talk freely as they ate and watched the professional women dancers perform the ancient dances of Iran.

The little lace-veiled bride sat solemnly before the guests, whispering replies to the comments of those on either side of her. As the night wore on, tears of weariness and excitement welled in her downcast eyes. Surreptitiously she wiped them away. It was long after midnight before the joy makers agreed it was time to take the bride to her husband's chamber. Amid much laughter they covered her once more with the house veil and ushered her into the hall.

" Call the bridegroom! " ordered Esmat's aunt. Shouts arose for Seyid Ali. He came, escorted by two men who hurried him along the passageway, and the party entered the bedroom, laughing at the shyness of the groom and his bride.

The pair were forced to sit side by side on the edge of the big bed, gay with embroidery and colored decorations. Esmat's aunt joined their two little fingers together, a cousin poured rose water over their hands, and a great shout of joy arose. Confetti, candies, and coins were scattered over their heads, and guests and servants crowded into the room, searching for the lucky silver pieces while they munched the tiny white candies.

Esmat and Ali sat side by side, their fingers still linked, until the last person had gone. Then Ali rose, walked slowly to the open windows, and carefully closed them against the summer night. He drew each curtain in place, then went to the door. As

he locked it and drew the curtain, a burst of laughter from without proved that his precautions had not been misplaced.

Esmat still sat uneasily on the bed. *Will he never look at me?* she thought. *Perhaps — can it be he does not care to see me?* Her weary mind conjured up fearful tales of men who refused to have their wives when once they had seen them in the privacy of their bedrooms.

Footsteps approached, a hand raised her soft, concealing veil, lifted her face. Her dark eyes looked up timidly to see the eyes of her husband studying her in the mirror before them. There was an apprehension in them that she did not have time to analyze before their expression changed to approval and pleasure.

" By the blessing of Allah! " he exclaimed. " You are more beautiful than they said you were. Thank God and his Prophet! What deer's eyes! What a moon face! I vow I shall love you forever."

He put his arms around her slender, trembling figure. " Do not fear me, little gift from Allah! I shall not hurt so sweet a flower."

The look of terror left her face as she looked into her young husband's eyes. *He is so kind, so handsome, so truly religious,* she thought. There was no fear now, only love in her deep-brown eyes.

And this love of a fourteen-year-old girl, born that night of her wedding, was long to be as her heart within her — pulsing, warm, unceasing, toward the man who held her in his arms while the nightingale warbled its soft notes in the still night.

Her trusting soul returned his embraces, but her girlish form was not ready for the flood of passion that swept him. Yet the nightingale had not ceased its song before he had forgotten his promise.

At last he lay asleep beside her. Esmat stared wide-eyed into the night, trying to still the wild beating of her heart, but beneath the weariness of her young body her heart sang, " He loves me." And the nightingale in the garden seemed to reply, " He loves thee."

She remembered her uncertainties at the time when the

khastigars had come on his behalf. She relived the evening in the Month of Fasting, when she had peeped at her suitor from behind the door curtain. They had told her he was handsome, and he was. They had told her he was correctly tutored in the meticulous customs of their religion — the turban with its handsome green band had remained on his head as it should. Why should she have doubted him or feared him?

She recalled the day of her final engagement, when, in her pink crepe de Chine dress covered with the sheer white prayer veil to her ankles, she had inspected the beautiful gifts he had sent her — sweetmeats pyramided high on glass servers; fruits marvelously stacked in high masses of color and topped with geranium blossoms, while vine-tied bouquets of narcissuses lay on the trays and the mingled fragrances were wafted about by the excited servants arranging the tables.

Now she smiled as she recalled how she had been banished from the room until her mother had called her once, twice, and three times. *I wanted to go at once, but Naneh and Baji would not let me.* She recalled her mother's stern face when she had come to the door after her. " You may go in now, but you are not to say anything or eat anything or appear in any way to be eager for your wedding," she had whispered to her.

Then the beautiful emerald ring which Ali had sent as his pledge had been placed on her finger by his mother. *It was so lovely — like a moss-green bud on my hand lying on the pink of my dress.*

Quietly Esmat rose and pulled back the heavy curtains to stare out into the night. The moon shone white above a willow. " He said I was beautiful too, like the moon. Am I as lovely as that? " she whispered.

Just such a moon had flooded the garden with its soft light on the night before her *Aqd,* the civil wedding ceremony. There had been great excitement among the servants, but she herself had wandered undisturbed from room to room, lingering longest before the great mirror, a gift from the groom-to-be, wondering whether Seyid Ali would be pleased when he saw her for the first time in its silvery depths.

The customs had been followed carefully that night. She re-

membered inspecting the low table to see that everything was in order: the multicolored seeds of incense; the flat piece of bread with *Mobarrak Baud* — " May It Be Blessed " — patterned on it with seeds in Persian script; the lump sugar cones in the center of the tray; the muslin she would sew up later.

She recalled how voices in the garden had awakened her the next morning and she had realized the day of her *Aqd* had arrived and the women were preparing to take her to the bath. When she saw them putting on their street veils, she had jumped up and cried: " How could I have slept so late! It is almost noon! "

The women had laughed, for it was only a short time since they had first seen the sun over the high wall of the garden. " We are ready," they had answered. " But the water will not be hot if we get to the bath too soon. And the bath woman will not have had her tea and she will pull your hair when she combs it."

Esmat had been unable to refute their arguments, but she would eat no breakfast and waited impatiently while they had each had a puff at the water pipe. For her the day had not properly begun until finally she had been undressed in the bath and she had submitted to the vigorous rubbing of the bath woman. " Shall I henna your hair and nails? " she had asked. Esmat's nurse had answered for her. " In the name of God and his Prophet, do you ask that? Is she not the daughter of the Mujtahid, one of the learned mollahs of Kashan, and is this not her wedding day? "

So the long task of beautifying her had begun. She had sat quietly on the clean tray while her feet were pumiced and the nails hennaed; she had stood under the gentle shower in the rinsing room protected from the gaze of the others by the red towel the bath woman held high in front of her. Wrapped in a dry one, she had been permitted to relax in the rest room, where her nurse poured tea for her and uncovered the food that had just arrived from her home. She remembered how she had dozed after her meal while the bath woman and her nurse gossiped. When she awoke, the hairdresser was ready to pluck her eyebrows into a perfect arch, to curl the hair about her

face and weave rows of tiny braids in the back, to rouge her lips and her cheeks and powder her until she had stared wonderingly at the strange face that looked back out of the mirror.

That evening the reception room of her home had been filled with women dressed in their best, glowing from recent baths and decorated with their most precious jewelry, with golden combs in their shorter front hair and golden coins tied to the many small braids in the back. Esmat remembered how quiet they were, how expectant, how eager.

She had heard only a sibilant sound now and then that told of a whisper, then silence once more. For she had remained with her aunt and her cousin in the little room across the hall. The white muslin had been unfolded and laid over her head so that no one could see the new bridal veil with its wax orange blossoms as she sat on the prayer rug, her slender feet flat beneath her. She knew, for she had seen the women putting it there, that the little lump she felt under the rug was essential to her future happiness in some way. From beneath her muslin covering she could see the illuminated Koran her father had given her lying in front of the gilt-framed mirror, a tray with incense at one side and near it the two cones of sugar to make her sweet. The Evil Eye had been warded off by the bread with its beautiful scroll, by the tangled silk threads to catch the Evil One in, by her aunt pounding the catnip in the mortar in the corner of the room, as she repeated over and over the little rhyme that should bring her happiness:

> *"As the fresh-scented catnip may the gentle bride be;*
> *As the cat, scent-crazed, may the bridegroom be,*
> *Eager to seize and to hold his fragrant bride."*

Finally a servant had announced the arrival of the akhoond, the religious magistrate, and soon she had heard his voice from the other side of the closed door. At first it had seemed far away, but gradually she realized that the Arabic he was intoning had been the suras of the Koran. They had sounded the major notes in the hymn of her joy. Then they had suddenly ceased and her name had been called. Had her aunt not leaned forward quickly and cautioned her to silence, she might have

answered at once, for she had completely forgotten that she must not appear eager to be married.

Again the akhoond had called, " Esmat, daughter of the Mujtahid, are you there? "

But she had sat silent, motionless, on the prayer rug before her Koran and her mirror.

The third time the magistrate called he asked whether she was there in person, or not. She had felt a gentle, prodding finger; her throat had been so dry that her voice was scarcely audible as she answered, " Yes."

Evidently the magistrate had heard, for then her contract of marriage had been read. She had heard again that her fiancé agreed to give her three thousand tomans in case he divorced her; he had duplicated the one hundred *mesquals* of salt that Hezrat Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, had taken with her; ten *mesquals* of silk thread and one copy of the Koran valued at one hundred tomans. She heard that he was giving her a diamond ring and two lamps and the gilt-framed mirror before her.

Then she had heard the voices of men on the other side of the closed door, and the scratching of reed pens on stiff paper as the certificates of marriage had been signed. Then the documents had been rolled and passed through the door, opened a crack to admit them, in order that she too should sign. How beautiful the certificates looked, with their illuminated borders and multitudinous scrolls of perfect penmanship covering the zar-long paper! Her aunt had rolled them again, one for her to keep, one to give to her husband. *I will frame mine,* she had thought. *It is too lovely to hide away in a trunk.*

Then the muslin covering had been removed and folded and laid aside for its future use, and now she saw clearly the grains of sugar her cousin had rubbed from the cones held over her head during the ceremony, and felt the shower of candies and silver coins flung at her as she had passed into the reception room. Of all the conversation that had followed she recalled only one question and its answer: " When is Seyid Ali coming to claim his bride? "

" When the Month of Mourning is finished. It would not be

fitting for them to see each other sooner," her mother had replied.

"Two months from now. You are right; it will be a good time for them, just before the summer begins," the guest had answered.

Two months filled with dreams of the time to come when Ali would take her to his home! She had often awakened trembling lest in real life as in her dreams he should not be pleased when he saw her. Sometimes she had comforted herself by gazing long and earnestly at her reflection in the pool of the garden.

The days had passed until the second new moon came, the new moon that had grown to the full and now was this moon she was gazing at while her husband lay sleeping. The night breeze that stirred the leaves of the willow drooping over the garden pool seemed to whisper, "He loves you."

She raised her eyes again from the shimmering pool to the gently moving leaves of the willow, then looked to the moon and its clear radiance that touched her world with such beauty; then far, far above it she saw the rosy tint of a star, of many stars in the depths of the heavens. "I would like to pray," she whispered, "but I cannot. I am unclean and I cannot pray until I have been to the bath again, and have been purified."

Finally she slipped like a moon shadow back into bed. The stars were fading when at last she slept.

CHAPTER 3

THE BRIEF, GENTLE SPRING OF KASHAN HURRIED INTO THE HOT summer of 1303, Al Hegira, which eventually laid aside its dusty costume and beckoned to the cool winds of autumn. These breezes flirted coyly with the city one day, then turned their backs to the mountains as if denying that they foretold winter and again blew hot sands from the desert about Kashan. All through the summer the household of the Motavali had carried on only the most essential work. Master and servants alike slept through the afternoon heat, coming to life only when the sun had set and they could parade down the avenues of the city and later feast with friends or relatives.

Now the revivifying coolness of autumn stimulated them to other activities in preparation for the coming winter. In former years Esmat had been busy helping her mother. She had learned to supervise the drying of grapes for raisins; she had watched the washing and drying of wheat for the family's bread; she had attended to turning the strips of eggplant so that they would dry evenly and thoroughly; she had helped in the cutting of perfect tomatoes and arranged them in patterns on the roof where they would become completely dehydrated for storing; the less perfect tomatoes she had helped strain through the finest hair sieve, catching the bright juice in bowls and platters and placing them in the sun too, where the liquid quickly evaporated to a thick gummy essence used in flavoring the winter's meat sauces. She had even learned the more difficult method of preserving tomato sauce by bottling the thick juice and sealing it with hot olive oil and corks covered with wax.

Esmat had done so much for her own strict mother that it was easy to work with Ali's mother now. She was glad to find

her no less expert in supervision and even more quiet and refined in her conduct toward the servants. Yet today when Esmat entered the kitchen the sight and smell of the tomatoes nauseated her and she was forced to leave the room. She did not see the glances her mother-in-law exchanged with the servants as they heard her retching in the lavatory nearby.

When she returned, Naneh asked why she did not feel well. Esmat answered briefly: " Malaria again, I suppose. You must buy me some quinine, Naneh," and reached for the silver knife to cut the tomatoes.

Her mother-in-law rose from her low stool. " Come with me, Esmat. I have a drug that will be better for you than quinine," she said.

As they neared the door she turned back to the women: " Go on with your work. I may not be back for a while, and this must be finished before you prepare our noon meal."

As Esmat stood there, a whiff of tomatoes blew past her and the full force of her nausea swept over her once more. " I am sorry — " she gasped and turned away again.

" Let me help her," said Naneh hurrying forward.

" You can do nothing; stay here," commanded the Motavali's wife.

Reluctantly Naneh returned to her work — without grumblings, though, for she approved of Esmat's mother-in-law's efficient ways. During the past four months, Naneh had learned that the commands of the Motavali's wife were seldom repeated. If they were not obeyed immediately her dark eyes flashed such scorn and disapproval that the offender rarely merited a second look of contempt. As Naneh joined the other women, they all remained silent until Esmat and her mother-in-law had moved out of hearing. Then the cook turned to Naneh. " Does she know the real reason for her sickness? Of course, when a young bride — "

Naneh vented her spleen on the woman. " Who knows why a woman vomits? Are you God that you should tell her it is not malaria? Keep your mouth shut. Esmat is my charge." She glowered at the others, daring them to contradict her.

For Naneh was not happy. She had not wanted to go to the

new home with the young bride. " Let Zahra go with Esmat," she had begged Fatima, the Mujtahid's wife. " You and I have been together fifteen years; you need me with Soroor too."

But Fatima would not argue. " Esmat has always loved you and you could comfort her when no one else could. If — may it not be God's will! — but if she should have trouble, you could help her." There had been nothing for Naneh to do but acquiesce.

The cook and her helper turned away from the tomatoes. " I must start the meat," said the one. " I will carry these to the roof," said the other, picking up a platter of cut fruit.

Alone, Naneh lived over in retrospect the first night in her new home. Esmat's aunt had summoned her long after the guests had departed and the two of them had stolen quietly to the closed door of the bridal chamber, where they stood listening for some minutes. But the silence of the night dispelled their fear that all might not be well with Esmat and at length they tiptoed away. On the morrow they had returned while Esmat was eating her breakfast, and together had found the proofs of Esmat's virginity and borne them to her father.

Naneh knew what Esmat had gone through, for she had been married when she was twelve. A year later, a kind fate had sent her husband on a journey from which he had never returned, nor had word ever come from him. When others had urged her to remarry, she had replied: " One husband was enough for me. In the name of the Prophet, why should I be bothered with a man? "

For Naneh had no children and she did not want them. She did not want Esmat to have any, either, and would gladly have given her quinine had she not been forestalled.

It was as if her thoughts had summoned the mistress of the house, for Naneh looked up to see her entering the door. " Prepare some tea for your mistress and take it to her room at once. I have told her to lie down and rest," she said. As Naneh rose, she added, " Be certain you do not tell her tales of young brides who had hard labors — "

" I will obey," said Naneh meekly.

The little brass samovar shone with the light of the glowing

charcoal embers as she dropped them within its fire pipe, and it responded by singing its cheery song almost immediately. Naneh placed it and the teapot, the small silver tea glass holder and the tea caddy on the tray and hurried to Esmat's room.

Esmat was lying on the big bed in the corner. " Fix me a bed on the floor, Naneh. This one is so big, I feel smothered in it." She shuddered a bit, then said as she saw that the familiar pallet was ready for her, " Help me over there, Naneh — I feel so strange."

As Naneh spread the tea things before her, Esmat burst into tears, hiding her face in her hands. Naneh knelt beside her and let her bury her face in her shoulder. " Why are you crying? Seyid Ali will like a little son, you know." She soothed her gently, and patted her head softly.

But Esmat sobbed on uncontrolledly. " But I feel so sick, and so strange — and I don't want a baby yet. O Naneh! Couldn't you give me something to stop it? "

She raised her tear-filled eyes, and Naneh longed to promise her uncertain comfort, but she dared not. Instead she said again: " Your husband will love to have a son; all men do, you know. It will be all right — you will feel better soon. When the new moon shines again — "

But the following weeks dragged for Esmat with the leaden feet of the overburdened donkeys who bore the salt from the lake through the rutty alkaline desert. And if these humble beasts stumbled and fell with weariness no one cared; they must plod on again, or be stung by a nail prod or whipped by a thorny stick. So it was with Esmat, for she was driven to take her nausea to her mother for sympathy and left stung by the secret reproaches she felt when her mother assured her that no true Moslem would ever do anything to bring about an abortion. It was one of the great sins which too many irreligious, ignorant women in Iran committed.

Unconscious of the real reason, sensing only a great unrest and dissatisfaction, Esmat turned to passion plays of Moharram for an outlet. She cried herself red-eyed after one session depicting the death of Hasan. That evening she said to her

husband: " Why have you never joined with the mourners? So many young men of the city are chain-beaters; it would win merit for both of us if you led a group as they went through the city on the tenth of Moharram."

Ali laughed. " The women love this sort of thing — let those who feel the need of it keep it up. I am satisfied to help my father occasionally and say my prayers when it is convenient or necessary."

But Esmat pressed him further. " Hassan, my brother, is having his head cut this year. Mother wanted him to do it long years ago, but father would not let him until he was bigger. Why don't you go with his group carrying a banner of mourning? You ought to, you know."

Ali looked at his wife. *She is not well at all,* he thought, *and how weeping changes her; she has lost all her beauty and she is becoming as fanatical as her mother.* Aloud he said: " I thought I would go to Qum for the tenth. It is time I took a pilgrimage again."

" You will leave me when I am not well? "

" Father has villages near there and it is time someone went to see them."

" But you do not like such work, you said. And you ought to help in the processions here — you really ought to. And I am not well — "

Ali's plans crystallized as she opposed him. " No, I am going to Qum. You have Naneh and your mother. Every man of Islam must take pilgrimages to holy places, and I have not been away since we were married. It will bring us good luck for you and the baby."

Ali had been away two weeks. Surrounded by servants who prevented her from exerting herself with even the smallest task, Esmat did not know what to do with her days. Superstitions hemmed her in like a curtain, imposing restrictions on most of her movements. Even the little clothes she would have liked to work on were being made, according to custom, by her mother.

Naneh sought excuses to be with her mistress. This morning she busied herself in Esmat's room while Esmat lolled lazily

near the window. She had brought in a freshly filled kerosene lamp, and picking up the chimney, held it to her mouth and blew into it, then polished it inside and outside, holding it to the light to look for imperfections in her work. Although she seemed absorbed in her task, Naneh was watching her mistress. At length she placed the glistening chimney in its place, picked up a few garments lying on the bed, hung them in the tiny curtained recess in the wall, then sighed long and loud.

Esmat turned her listless head. "What's the matter, Naneh?"

"My bones ache all over. The other women say I have rheumatism. Bah! I am not old enough for that. I know what it is, but I can't tell them."

"What is it? You can tell me—" Esmat's interest was caught at last.

"It's that room I have to sleep in. It's damp all the time. The very first morning after your wedding I noticed a damp ring on the plaster; it never is dry—that watercourse in the arched pathway seeps into the bricks, and that is the reason for rheumatism—not old age at all."

Esmat looked at her a moment. "You really are not young, Naneh!"

"Why didn't I have these pains when I was in the Mujtahid's home? I had a nice sunny room in the basement—that's the reason." She was triumphant in her rebuttal. "And there is another thing I don't like here. The water pipe that the servants all use is not nearly so sweet as the old one was."

"The water pipe! Oh, yes. The one mother gave you was from Kerbela clay. Why did you not bring it with you?"

"Baji would not let me—she said I would have a better one here, but it isn't. I hate its glass bottom; the bubbles chase each other round and round, it is true, but when they rise to enter the long tube they do not come with the force that the old Kerbela pipe had." Naneh grew poetic in her diatribe against the Turkish pipe of her new home.

Esmat smiled and rose from her pallet. "That is something we can do today."

"What did I say to make you get up?" Her woman was

confused.

" Let's go to the bazaar and buy you a new water pipe, Naneh."

So they dressed and went off on a shopping excursion, searching for, and finally buying, a Kerbela clay water pipe for Naneh. And another long day had passed away when Naneh tucked Esmat in for the night and sought her damp room in the basement, well pleased with the ruse that had kept Esmat busy.

It was a week later when Ali returned. He did not linger long in the women's apartments, however, and Naneh shook her head sadly when she found Esmat weeping in her lonely room. It was a scene that repeated itself often in the next months as Esmat neared the end of her pregnancy. Naneh became fiercely protective and muttered imprecations under her breath as she saw his indifference to her mistress's charms.

There was great excitement in the home of the Motavali. For two days all the women relatives and their female servants had been in the women's quarters sighing, groaning, and shrieking in sympathy with the young bride. For two days the midwives sought to help the young girl through the crisis that had stolen upon her in the midst of her happiness.

Now there was great joy, for the low tub, with its finely sifted wood ashes, which had caught the wee newcomer first, had been carried out of the darkened room, while within was the sound of a crying baby.

"Alhambdo l'Illah!" cried Naneh. " It is finished at last. I go to tell the young master the baby is here."

" You'll get no gift for the news of a girl! " cried a chorus of female voices.

" Bah! It will make no difference to him. Thanks be to God for his blessing this day: the little khanum, my lady, and her baby will live." Naneh was weeping with relief. It had been a long two days in which she could only kneel and support one side of her suffering mistress while some other woman supported the other side. The nights had been no better, for no one dared let Esmat sleep. Naneh had even helped roll her in

the big comforter so that the men might shake it to keep her awake.

Naneh hurried to the porch where the men were seated. " God be praised, my khanum, my lady will live," said she.

" *Ya Allah!* The baby has come! " exclaimed Ali, half rising from his seat on the rug.

" Yes, the little khanum, the tiny lady, has arrived."

Ali jumped to his feet. " The baby is a *girl!* " he cried.

His father laid a restraining hand on him. " Don't become all hands and feet at the news. It often happens; my first was a daughter too." He fumbled in the folds of his green sash, drew out a small velvet case and a coin, and handed them to his son. " Send this to your wife; she will be very tired. Give the coin to Naneh," he directed.

Ali stared at the gifts in his hand and muttered, " Who gives presents for a baby girl? " Yet he handed them to the woman standing silently before him.

Naneh backed down the steps murmuring: " Thank you, thank you. May God bless you this day." At the bottom step she paused an instant as she turned to leave. " *Insha Allah,* if God wills, it will be a boy next time."

The Motavali turned to his son. " It is true that girls are an expense and a burden, but some must be born or there would be no sons to carry on our name."

Ali threw out his hands in a characteristic gesture of annoyance. " I am sorely disappointed," he said.

His father looked with dark, wise eyes into the sun-filled garden. Flowers had just been set out, winter was over, wagtails were flitting about the pool, alighting now and then to catch insects. He watched them awhile, then remarked, " Personal disappointments are of little importance in the plan of life, it would seem."

In the *anderun,* Naneh triumphantly displayed the gold coin and the velvet case, but she kept her own counsel as to who the real donor had been. " Did I not tell you it would make no difference to the young master? Would he have given me these with his own hands if he had not been pleased with my news? "

Baji stared unbelievingly at the small gold coin. " Five

tomans! What star were you born under that your fate should be so fortunate? Who ever heard of a gold piece for a baby girl? "

" Did I not tell you that Seyid Ali loves the khanum? Have I not told you that he calls her his beloved, with the eyes of a deer and the face of the moon in its glory? Have I not told you that he tells her she is his sweet jasmine flower? You did not believe me. Now let these be a witness that I have not lied to you." Naneh turned her back on her doubting friend and entered the darkened room where Esmat lay with her small daughter wrapped in swaddling clothes beside her.

Naneh knelt beside the iron bed and extended her hands with the velvet case in them. " Your husband has sent you this," said she.

Esmat gave a sigh of relief. " Then he was not angry that it was not a son! Praise God for that! " She opened the case and exclaimed with joy at the beauty within: a pair of pearl earrings lying like tiny bunches of iridescent grapes against the blue velvet background. There were tears in her eyes as she raised them to her faithful servant. " He loves me, Naneh," she said simply.

" *Bali, bali,* yes, yes, he loves you," echoed Naneh. She rose from her knees and slipped quietly from the room to confront Baji once more.

But Baji had had time to think. " It is well this time," said she. " But it will not be the same again. I know the men of Iran. They are all the same; they want sons, not daughters."

" You speak truly," admitted Naneh. " If God wills, it will be a son next time."

" *Insha Allah!* " said Baji.

Esmat let the lovely pearl pendants lie in her hands. She was very weary but this new sign of her husband's love had given her such joy that she must share it. She called her mother.

Fatima had sunk into an exhausted slumber as soon as the new grandchild had been oiled and wrapped in swaddling clothes until it looked like a little cocoon. But she started now as she heard her name. " What is it? What do you want? " she asked, sleepily.

" Nothing. You are tired," said Esmat, sorry that she had awakened her. Looking at the wee bit of humanity lying beside her in bed, she said softly, " I shall call her Effat for she has brought me honor."

" Effat! " repeated her mother. " Why, that is what your own name means! "

Esmat, scarcely more than a child herself, had not wanted a baby so soon, yet she lay now exhausted but happy. " Honor has been my portion this day, *Alhambdo l'Illah!* "

But a gentle snore was her only answer; Fatima had fallen asleep again.

CHAPTER 4

THE PACE OF TIME CHANGED SUDDENLY FROM THE WEARY plodding of pregnancy to the hurrying days of young life. Esmat felt a new buoyancy, which seemed to come from the release of her burden but actually radiated from the unexpected joys of motherhood. For her little daughter thrived normally, was nursed whenever she cried, was sent out in the garden with Naneh if she annoyed either mother or father. Effat was a charming baby and Naneh became her devoted slave.

Sometimes her father deigned to notice her, but usually he had eyes only for his wife, who blossomed with blushes at his unaccustomed remarks on her fresh beauty. If he preceded his compliments by saying Effat was her image and would someday be almost as lovely as her mother, Esmat glowed with maternal radiance sufficient to include her handsome young husband, who basked in her joy and forgot the duties that had taken him away from her side so often in the past months.

The servants whispered together that all was as it should be when a *kuchelu,* a baby, came into a household. One and all united in serving the baby — the young couple, the grandfather and grandmother — for that was how it always had been in Kashan; there was no reason for change in such time-honored customs.

But the winds of revolution were stirring the thoughts of men far out in the mountain districts and twirling them round and round, like the sands of the desert which are picked up by whirlwinds and scattered far from their original places. So men looted and rampaged because their young ruler, Sultan Ahmad of the Kajar dynasty, had left Iran for a visit to Europe. No one in Kashan knew why he had gone or cared that he had, but tales reached them that the Shah-in-Shah had

found much joy in the bright lights of Paris and was overstaying his leave. It was not right for a ruler to be away too long, said the people of Kashan.

Unconsciously men changed in their attitudes toward their shah. They ceased to revere him. They watched instead a new man who was subduing the troublesome tribes in northwestern Iran, a capable officer who had been assigned to quell the rebellions. As victory followed victory, grateful people shouted: "*Zindeh baud!* Long live our deliverer!" and finally Parliament rose in acclaiming Riza Pahlavi ruler in place of their absent figurehead. From the wedding of the military and parliamentary rulers the Pahlavi dynasty was born.

A year's preparation for splendid coronation followed. The Palace of the Shahs of Iran was renovated; the Peacock throne — *Takht-i-taus* — was refurbished until it shone with its pristine glory. The crown jewels were given a new setting in the beautiful Pahlavi crown; a magnificent cape of hand-embroidered Kerman cloth was covered with myriads of perfect pearls from the Bahrein Islands in the Persian Gulf. Marvelous gifts from the provinces and from foreign lands poured in.

On April 25, A.D. 1926, in the month of Bahman, the new ruler placed the new crown on his head and received the plaudits of the splendid gathering assembled to do him honor. There was joy even as far as Kashan, for had not many of its finest rugs been accepted for the new palace? The people expected a reign of prosperity, security, and peace for their gifts.

Yet the new shah had not been long on the throne before a question, a whisper, was heard that he planned changes for his people. Some old men cited examples of changes in other dynasties: the caravansery built by Shah Abbas; the change in women's apparel when Muzaffar-ed-Din Shah returned from Europe; the color of the military attire; the increase in taxation; the representation in Parliament by the people themselves. Yes, Iran had had political changes, it was true.

But for generations the families of the religious leaders had not changed their customs or costumes. There could be no change that would affect the lives of the Motavali and the Mujtahid, the lives of Seyid Ali and Esmat and their daughter

Effat, save the changes of springtime and harvest, the births and the deaths in Kashan.

Yet in February of the next year, Seyid Ali walked into the courts of the Shrine, a frown of displeasure on his brow. His father had summoned him to his private room where he kept the records of the lands belonging to the priests of the temple of Islam.

As he entered the study, his father closed the door quietly, stood a minute listening lest anyone should pry on his privacy, then seated himself beside the little stool table and motioned for his son to do the same. Ali, who was two hands taller than his father, disliked being treated like a little boy. Nevertheless he folded his long legs gracefully, seated himself opposite his parent, and read the paper his father handed him.

The two turbaned heads were strangely alike. One had a long red beard, hennaed to cover the gray hairs that would have marked his age; the other had a short black beard, neatly trimmed; both pairs of eyes were dark and troubled. Before them lay a communication from the recently reorganized Ministry of Education in the capital city.

" It is impossible," declared the Motavali. " Yet here it is written that all those who would serve in the Shrine of Islam must pass an examination in the religion of Mohammed. If one is not well versed in Moslem law and ethics, one will be forced to lay aside the seyid's turban and all other insignia of his religious rank: the priestly robe, the green sash, each and every sign of honor."

" How is it possible for the shah to take away the rights that a man has inherited? " exclaimed Ali. " In the name of the Prophet, this cannot be done."

" There is one thing that you can do," his father replied. " You can study and learn in a few weeks or months at the most the lessons it has taken me a lifetime to master. God knows you are clever enough at anything that you care to undertake."

" Of course I could, but why should I? Why should I study such silly laws as the care of the property that a certain bricklayer has bequeathed to the Shrine? What difference does it

make so long as the Shrine has the moneys to spend? "

"It would be well if you knew a little more Arabic and could transcribe it better for those who want to make their wills in the holy writ."

"That is still more foolish. Let the dying write their wills in a tongue all can understand. *Ya Allah!* Should I, Ali, the son of the Motavali, a seyid born, a descendant of Mohammed, recently allied by marriage to the Mujtahid, the teacher of the mollahs of Kashan, be compelled to become a pupil again? "

The Motavali leaned low over the little stool table to examine the document once more. At length he said: "I see no other way out of it, unless you wish to take the examinations without further study. Your fortune has always been a good one; it may be that you will have the good luck to pass this new test."

Ali acknowledged the wisdom of his parent's remark by an affirmative nod. "True! I was born under the Star of Good Fortune in the month of Esfand. I will take the examinations when the time comes and I am confident I will pass." He bowed low to his father. "You gave me good tutelage, my father; I have not forgotten my school days in the Mosque."

He rose, dusted his knees with his handkerchief, backed toward the door, stepped into his shoes standing beside it, bowed again to his father, and departed. As the door closed behind him, the older man muttered to himself: "By Allah! with his luck, he will probably succeed and I shall fail. It is well I went at my lessons."

The thought of examinations displeased Seyid Ali; it was not pleasant to be in his presence when he was in that mood, frowning and petulant. He returned to his home seeking someone to vent his anger upon, summoned his servant. "Where is the khanum? Tell her I want to see her. Call Hassan, the chauffeur, at once."

"*Bali, bali.* I have gone, I have told them." The menial slipped out quickly, glad to be out of sight of his young master's scowling countenance.

The door of the private apartments opened and Esmat entered. Her house veil hung gracefully from her forehead over

her head to her feet; her slender hands grasped both sides near her throat, drawing the soft folds close to her cheeks. " Did you wish to see me? or your mother? " she asked, her dark eyes expressing her surprise at his summons.

" My mother? Why should I want my mother? Did I not marry you to help me? to serve me? Get my things ready. I am going on a journey." He turned to the window.

She flushed with pleasure. " You are taking me! "

" You! Why should I take you? I am going on business. I do not want to bother with women. Besides, you could not leave the baby."

Esmat shook her head slowly. " No, I could not leave Effat." Her girlish figure drooped and her eyes fell. It had been her dream to go to the capital with her husband someday. The last time he had gone she had not been well and dared not attempt the long journey. Now tiny hands held her back.

Ali gave her no time for further reflections. " It is cold," said he. " I shall want my sheepskin wrap, the carpetbag with my best clothes in it." He glanced about the room; then his eyes fell on the rug hanging on the far wall. He studied it for a moment. " I will take that rug as a present for the chief examiner," he added.

Esmat turned in startled protest. " Not that one! It is mine. I made it with my own hands."

" What difference does that make? You have its mate, do you not? I must take something very fine as a present. It will please the examiner to know that my wife made it."

" But it is mine! I do not wish to give it away. It was part of my dowry." Her girlish figure took on a new dignity as determination stiffened her posture; her delicate hands trembled as she clasped her veil closer about her pale face.

Ali saw that to force his point would be to lose it, so he changed the subject to the food he would need for the journey. " Give me some of that delicious pounded meat that you taught the cook to make so well. And some of the fresh bread that was just being taken from the oven as I came by; a few hard-boiled eggs, nuts and raisins, an apple or two. That should be enough."

Esmat had relaxed as he had listed the foods and smiled when he complimented her meat cakes. " I will have everything ready. What time do you wish to start? " she said meekly.

" About sunrise; it is a long journey." Ali allowed his face to become serene as he drew his wife toward him in an embrace. " If God wills, I will take you with me the next time. I will bring you a remembrance, this time," he promised.

Esmat flushed at the unexpected sign of affection, but she pulled herself from his arms as the door opened and Naneh came in. " I have gone to get your food ready," she said as she fled from the room to hide her embarrassment.

As she left him, Ali turned to the serving-woman. " Take that rug down — " he pointed to the rug Esmat had woven — " Sweep it, and give it to me myself in my private office in half an hour."

Naneh looked surprised, but said nothing. After Ali had gone, she took down the rug, carried it to the front porch, swept it, and folded it as directed. Then she laid it on the chair in Ali's private room.

It was dark when Esmat had finished overseeing the preparations for her husband's journey. She nursed her baby, and then, without returning to the big reception room, she welcomed her husband in their small family room, seated beside the *cursie,* the covered brazier. Effat slept in her cradle while they ate their supper and Esmat grew rosy with pleasure as her husband complimented her and the baby. She was sorry she could not go with him, but she was content with his demonstrations of affection, with his interest in his sleeping child.

It was early dawn when the automobile arrived for Ali. Confusion and excitement reigned until finally the young master had bid his wife and retainers farewell and the car rolled down the cobbled streets of Kashan.

Esmat walked slowly back into the house, entering the reception room on the way to her own warm place under the *cursie.* Suddenly she paused. The morning sun, just risen, had touched the vacant spot on the wall. " Naneh! " she called sharply.

" *Bali, bali!* I am coming," her woman answered as she hurried to her summons.

Esmat pointed to the wall. " Where is my rug? " she asked.

" Seyid Ali bid me sweep it and put it in his office. I did so. Probably it is still on the chair where I put it."

" Probably," said Esmat, quietly. Yet she did not go into Ali's office.

Nor did Naneh. They both knew that Ali had taken it with him, yet neither gave a sign of her knowledge. Instead, they walked from the room, Esmat with her face still and white, Naneh shaking her head sadly as she followed a few paces behind.

Esmat curled up under the warm comforter over the *cursie* and tried to sleep again. But she found that she could not forget the empty place on the wall, the conversation of yesterday. Ali knew that she had not wanted him to take her rug, had even forbidden it. Yet he had taken it. Memory leaped the chasm of years. What pride she had felt when finally her pair of rugs had been completed, their tapes sewn on for hanging on the wall of her home! And how pleased she had been, how proud that they were lovelier than any others her husband had furnished for her new home! Just recently she had thought what beautiful heirlooms they would make for her own small daughter.

Now one was gone. She had been married long enough to notice that whatever her husband wanted he succeeded in getting. His way, his will, ruled supreme in her household.

" He promised to bring me a remembrance," she said to her sleeping baby, but her heart answered: *No gift can take the place of my own rug. To him it is only a rug; it is nothing. He can buy me another that will be better, he thinks.* She stared into space, whispering to herself: " There is no other that can take its place. It is my own, my very own. I wove it with my own hands."

Naneh entered with the steaming samovar. " A cup of tea will warm you," she said as she spread the tea cloth over the silk rug on the low *cursie* top, set the silver tea service in front of her mistress, put the tea in the pot, and placed it on top of the shining samovar. She chatted on to her mistress: " How nice it is to have a husband who worships you! See how lovely

your things are! This is such a perfect silk rug; the silver holders for the tea glasses are so delicate. Isn't it wonderful good fortune to have such a husband to provide for you? "

Her timely compliments soothed Esmat. She drank the tea and studied afresh the delicate tracery on the silver container of the tiny tea glass. Yes, it was very lovely, she agreed. Her mother's had been nice, but this was unusually perfect. She tried to forget the vacant spot on the wall.

It was many hours later, as the car reached the long, monotonous stretch between Qum and Teheran, that Ali thought of the rug. " It was lucky that Esmat did not see it was gone. She might have carried on like a child and I hate crying women. She will have forgotten all about it before I return. A present to the chief examiner must be something unusually valuable. How ashamed she would be if my seyid's sash were removed, if I were not allowed to wear my turban! One is justified in all things for the sake of Islam."

He settled back comfortably in his car. It would not be long before he could deliver his offering in person. Ali smiled when he thought of examinations. Who in this land ever believed that merit settled such affairs? The most acceptable gift determined whether one retained one's inherited privileges. What could be finer than a Kashan rug, woven by the daughter of the Mujtahid for her dowry?

CHAPTER 5

THE MOTAVALI SAT ALONE IN HIS STUDY IN THE MOSQUE OF Kashan. His servant had just brought him fresh cigarettes and he puffed almost continuously, lighting one from another. He had spent the past six months in unaccustomed mental labors and now his face was sunken and yellow from close confinement, his eyes too bright and restless, and his hand trembled as though with palsy.

Fear that he would be disrobed, deturbaned, and dishonored had driven him day and night. Now both the ordeal and his fears were over; for a telegram received that day informed him that his examination had been acceptable and that he was allowed to retain his post. Of this he was proud and happy. Yet he dared not share his good fortune with the family, for the same telegram had contained the news that Ali, his first-born son, had failed.

He recalled the day when Ali had gone to the capital, advising his father to forget his lessons, because he, a young man of the times, knew how to settle such affairs — a little judicious bribing, a good deal of flattery, a few opportune lies, and all would be well. Ali knew. He had returned from Teheran vastly satisfied with his trip. The rug had been accepted and smooth promises given in return. Nevertheless, this telegram proved that Ali, in spite of all his confidence, had failed to read the signs of the times aright.

But the fear that had driven the elder man had also been like a surgeon's scalpel, opening his eyes to the dawning of the new day in Iran. He had marveled at the way the new ruler was guiding the ship of state. He had read a new meaning in the announcements of events in the capital and wondered if the time had come when men must account for their indiffer-

ence to right and wrong. He foresaw a new strain of honesty and courage flowing into the slow veins of Iran, bringing youth and vigor to a nation long considered by the world as ancient beyond the hope of rejuvenation. And the fear that he might be found unworthy to serve his beloved Shrine had been potent enough to awaken torpid brain cells and he had astonished his examiners by his astute answers to their involved questions. But now his dark fears for the future had shifted to anxiety for his own son and his reactions to the telegram.

As he sat thus in his study, he heard a footfall on the brick floor of the hall and recognized the lazy dignity of Ali's steps.

It is well, he thought as he knocked the ashes of his cigarette into the brass bowl on the table. *Saadi spoke truly: " Old men of experience, who know the value of words, reflect and then speak." Reflections have ended; it is now time to speak.*

The door opened and Seyid Ali entered. He glanced questioningly at his parent. " Sir, what news is there? "

The elder man looked up slowly from the papers on his low table. " Thank God! I have received the telegram."

Ali turned to one side as he lighted a cigarette with a self-assured air. " We have been accepted, of course. I arranged all that in Teheran." Ali calmly watched the smoke spiral lazily upward. Silence filled the little room as it rose slowly toward the curls of the Persian script on the glazed bricks near the ceiling. Again he glanced at his parent. " Why do you look so downhearted? Can it be that you have failed? "

" No, my son, I have been retained an honored slave in the sacred Shrine of Islam." Yet the older man's hands trembled as he spoke.

Ali looked at him scornfully. " You have worn yourself out with your studies. You shake like one with malaria! Why should you be so downcast? *Ya Khoda! Ya Allah!* You look like a dying man! "

The Motavali studied his son a moment. " You are nervous yourself. Is it necessary to be so disrespectful? "

Ali stretched his arms out in appeal to the heavens. " What have I done now? In the name of the Prophet, cannot a son tell his father he looks sick without being accused of disrespect? I

am fed up with life in this city of old men and old fashions. I hate it all! I wish I had never even tried the examinations. I would choose another occupation."

" Supposing you had not passed, what would you do? " His father carefully brushed the ashes from his cigarette before he looked up at his son.

Ali stared at him as though he had not heard correctly. As the import of his father's question struck him, he drew himself erect. " What would I do? I would enter the army tomorrow. I would discard these skirts and effeminate falderal and be a man among men at last! "

The Motavali rose slowly from the cushion before his table. He too pulled himself up to his full height and his red beard stood out vindictively. " You have been very rude to Islam just now. It is just as well that you have been refused permission to hold your hereditary honors. There are others — "

" What do you mean? Can it be that you have passed and I, I have failed? Speak openly, can't you? " Ali grabbed his father by the arm and shook it.

" Here is the telegram."

Seyid Ali was speechless as he read the brief message. His father watched him throw the paper on the table with an angry gesture. Then the old man spoke. " It would seem you are not to be allowed to choose your way. Your country has said that you are not wise enough to be a priest of Islam."

" What? Not wise enough to follow in your footsteps? Is the sacred green to be a sign of wisdom and not of heritage? Are we not of the blood of the Prophet? "

" It would seem that blood does not count. Knowledge of one's task is more important these days. I warned you it would be well to study — "

Ali interrupted him. " Such things have never been done before. We were the choosers. Am I to be compelled to wear those ugly foreign clothes? Am I to be seen as a merchant, or an ordinary shopkeeper — I who have the Prophet's blood in my veins? " Ali stood, his face dark with anger, looking across at his father.

" Yet you just said — "

" That was different. I will not be forced to do this thing. Allah forbid that I so dishonor his Prophet. What would my mother and my wife say if I laid aside this sacred turban and sash of my heritage? "

" It would seem they are to have no say in the matter. You are disrobed by those in power. The penalty for disobedience is imprisonment, perhaps worse."

Seyid Ali picked up the telegram once more, read it quickly, and tossed it again on the little table. Then he walked slowly to the window and stood looking out on the courtyard where several men were laving their arms and legs in preparation for the noon prayers. Pigeons, like silver leaves in the hot sky, wheeled and flew downward to alight on the blue dome of the Mosque. It was a scene of peace which Ali had watched since he first was old enough to be taken to the masjid. In all that time there had been no change save that now and then a brick had fallen out, or one of the tiny panes of colored glass in a window had been broken by a careless servant. It was a place where change had never come, where father had been followed by son for so many generations that the possibility of alteration had never been considered. In spite of his scornful words Ali realized that something deep in his heart was being uprooted, and that pain and disappointment had taken the place of security and peace.

He turned to his father. " Let us go home," he said in a low voice. " I belong here no longer. What the future holds for me God alone knows."

The Motavali leaned over and straightened the papers on his table. He locked some away in the drawers, then stood erect once more. " ' The habit of a dervish is the garment of resignation,' " he quoted. " It is well that you do not anger those in authority. Saadi said: ' If any misfortune befalleth you, bear with it, that by forgiving others, you may yourself obtain pardon. . . . Seeing that we are at last to return to earth, let us humble ourselves in ashes before we are changed into dust.' "

Ali seemed not to hear his father's muttered words of advice as he stood aside to let him pass into the paved courtyard. He followed his father past a devotee of Islam who had just placed

his seal on his prayer cloth and was kneeling in an attitude of expectancy, looking upward to the minaret over the doorway. Ali looked up also and saw the muezzin standing in the arched opening at the top of the minaret. His hands were cupped about his lips, and a moment later the call to noon prayers rang out over the city.

Automatically father and son paused for a minute, so accustomed were they to obeying that summons. Ali, however, took his father's arm and pulled him on toward the doorway. " They are not for me, these calls to prayer. Let us go home to consider the future."

Shaking his head regretfully, the Motavali followed his son from the courtyard of the masjid.

Esmat stood on the porch of the *anderun* calling her woman. " Naneh! Come, take care of Effat. I think I heard Seyid Ali come in and I want to help prepare that special omelet — the *coocoo* he loves."

She leaned over the porch to look down at the kitchen door.

But instead of Naneh, the cook poked her head out from behind the curtain of the doorway. " Naneh isn't here," she said.

Esmat was provoked. " Where did she go? "

" She remembered you wanted eggs. I forgot and used them all, so she went to the bazaar to get more. She will be back in a minute now."

Esmat was relieved. " There is time, I think. Send her up when she comes."

The cook disappeared within, and Esmat, her veil falling down over her shoulders, turned back in the doorway. The big mirror at the end of the room caught her reflection silhouetted against the bright sunlight of the porch. She paused as she looked at herself a moment. *Can it be seven months since Ali came home from Natanz?* she thought. *He was so glad to see me. If God wills, this time it will be the son he wants.*

She sat down on the floor near the door and held out her arms to the toddler trying to walk steadily toward her mother.

" Effat! Dear little one, come here! "

The baby crowed with delight as Esmat caught her in her arms and hugged her. A sound of hurrying footsteps in the garden caused her to turn. Rushing up the steps was Naneh — her leisurely, slow-moving servant!

" Naneh! How quickly you came! " She stopped, stared at her in surprise. " What is the matter? Are you sick? "

" I've been running," gasped Naneh. " I wanted to tell you, I wanted to be with you — " Her voice trailed off for lack of breath.

Esmat shook her arm. " What is it? Have you seen a ghost? "

But Naneh had herself in hand at last. " Sit down, sit down. I will tell." She sank to the floor and began rocking backward and forward as women in grief were accustomed to do. " Has the aga come yet? "

" I think I heard him enter the *biroon.* Did you get the eggs? "

Naneh slapped at her own face in dismay. " No. I forgot them. But you will too when you hear my news." She could contain herself no longer. " The telegram has come. My sister's son who works in the telegraph office ran almost all the way here to tell me. We met on the way to the bazaar."

" What telegram? Who has died? "

" No one has died. But Seyid Ali will wish he had."

" My husband? Naneh, do tell me what telegram came — " Esmat nervously drew her calico veil closer, drawing it tightly about her cheeks as she automatically did when she prayed.

Her woman rushed ahead with her tale. " Such news — such terrible news — Seyid Ali has failed in his examinations. He has been ordered to lay aside his seyid's turban, his green sash; he must put on the clothes of a civilian! Curses on those who have done this thing! " Naneh spat out the last words with venom.

As she finished speaking the door between the two gardens opened and she saw the tall figure of her young master enter.

Esmat leaned forward, hissed to her woman: " It can't be true. Don't let him know you have told me. These telegrams often are wrong — "

Esmat rose quietly as her husband came up the steps. " You have brought happiness," she said in her customary greeting. She turned to Naneh. " Take Effat into the garden until dinner is ready."

Glad to escape, Naneh grabbed the baby in her arms, shook her head doubtingly at her mistress, and hurried to spread her alarming news to the women in the garden. When she had left, Esmat turned to her husband. It could not be true. He looked the same as ever, with the turban and sash he always wore. Or was he more serious? Were his eyes usually so troubled? Should she tell him the rumor she had heard?

But Seyid Ali spoke first. " Word has come of the results of the religious examinations. There are many whose lives will be changed by their failure to pass the Government tests."

" Yes, it will be hard for the old men, won't it? Did your father fail? "

" No, he passed. He has worked hard, much too hard; he is almost sick with his trembling." Ali stopped, lighted a cigarette, waited for her to say something.

What could she say? She hesitated, felt for words, then spoke, " Do you know anyone who failed? "

Ali took a puff at his cigarette. *I am glad Naneh has not told her the bazaar gossip,* he thought. He puffed again, then decided to tell her himself. " Yes, I know some of them; there are many — young men, old men — priests of Islam — students and acolytes. I myself failed! And the man who took your rug so gladly lied to me. May his father burn in hell! "

Esmat's throat constricted. " Are you sure it is true? You gave my rug as a bribe and he failed you? " Her hands fluttered as she drew up her chuddar and her brown eyes glowed with fear, fear that this horrible nightmare was true. How could he be so calm?

But Ali laughed scornfully, shortly. " If I had given them a pair of rugs instead of one only, I would not have been failed by the examiners."

" You — you cannot — you may not wear a turban any more? or a sash? or a frock coat? "

" There will be many like me," said Seyid Ali.

" They cannot take away your right! " Esmat grew defensive, as he himself had.

" You mean they cannot take the Prophet's blood from my veins! But I will have to wear the clothing they dictate or be shut up in prison. I prefer to change my attire."

" What does your father say? " Esmat caught at an anchor — her father-in-law was a powerful man; surely he would manage to keep his son in the ranks of the clergy.

Seyid Ali quoted as his father had, " The habit of a dervish is the garment of resignation — "

Her heart stood still as she realized at last the hopelessness of her appeals. She whispered, " It is a disgrace — " She gave a moan and, sliding down to the floor, lay still and white at his feet.

Surprised at this turn of affairs, Ali stood a moment looking down at Esmat. In her still, white face he saw only a woman who had failed him in a crisis. Or was his own shock so recent that he could not sense the horror of his disgrace to one who had loved him first because of his impeccable devotion to Islam?

He turned to the door. *" Ya Ali! Ya Khoda! "* he called out. " Just like a woman! They are all children and fools! Naneh! Come here! " His disgust and dismay showed itself in his voice when he added: " Come here quickly, I tell you. Quickly! "

Naneh, knowing his fury when she was slow to obey, hurried up the steps. She gave one glance at Esmat crumpled on the floor and shouted for the cook and Ali's mother to come to her aid.

" Two women and a girl are enough to cope with hysterics," said Ali, and he went back to the men's quarters.

All afternoon the coming and going in the women's apartments annoyed him, but Ahmad, his father's chief steward, had come from the village area of Natanz and his father insisted that Ali must hear his reports and render account to him later that evening.

Now it was dusk and Ahmad, the nazir, had been dismissed. He decided to stop at the gate to the *anderun* to ask Naneh the reason for the confusion he sensed from the sounds issuing

through the thin walls. Pulling a rose from the bushes as he walked to the door, he plucked at its petals, now and then lifting them to his nostrils and sniffing appreciatively. He lifted the knocker and rapped it on the closed door. A few minutes elapsed, then he knocked again, more insistently. What could be keeping Naneh? He was not an old man that any woman should keep waiting. Let Naneh keep him much longer and he would go, never to return save when business demanded.

Just as he reached this conclusion, the door opened. Naneh, clad in her house veil, stood before him. " Salaam aleikum. Peace be with you." Her hand rose to her lips in warning. " Be very still! Esmat Khanum is very ill; the doctors are here even now and they have advised us to call the midwives at once."

Ahmad studied the excited woman before him. " What has caused this sudden change? " he inquired.

Naneh was too disturbed to reply coherently. " His turban, his seyid's sash, his sacred green have all been taken away and he is forced to wear that ugly hat and short coat of the foreigners. She would not believe it at first, but when Seyid Ali told her himself, she fainted away. Now she is conscious, but she has not ceased weeping at the disgrace that he has brought upon her."

The overseer nodded slowly. " And when she wept she beat her chest and tore her hair, and brought on the pains before their time. I see, I see."

" You are right," said Naneh. " And I must go at once and try again to quiet her. Perhaps we can save her yet, and if it should be a boy — " She turned to go, spoke over her shoulder, " Come again at dawn, and I will give you what news I can."

The door closed, the bar slid into place, and Ahmad wandered slowly up the street toward the setting sun. He had forgotten his errand in surprise at the news which stirred him. Truly it was a new day in Iran when a family so important and of such high position was forced to change its dress to suit the times.

Absorbed in his thoughts, he wandered on until he found himself in the narrow lane leading to the covered bazaar, where he entered a coffeehouse nearby and seated himself on a long,

high bench, drawing his legs up gracefully and sitting cross-legged above the watercourse. A small attendant came out, saw who the customer was, hurried back for his master, who quickly appeared and stood subserviently beside the bench.

" Tea," said Ahmad. " But not in any of your big glasses, only fit for foreigners and gluttons; give me tea in the delicate, tiny glass of the aristocratic Persian."

" *Bali, bali!* " agreed Hassan, the proprietor. " Who but Feringi want tea in those big glasses? " He disappeared, to return almost immediately carrying a small brass tray with a dainty glass of tea in a silver holder.

" You have not many customers this evening," remarked Ahmad.

" No, not yet. They will come soon, though, for there is news! "

" What can be the news you refer to? " Ahmad eyed the other shrewdly.

The proprietor hovered over the teapot, adding fresh water and new tea leaves to the brew. He dismissed the boy, then said in a low tone to his customer, " There is great excitement in the home of the Motavali."

Ahmad shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. " The birth of a premature baby is not such news, is it? "

" That? Oh, that is nothing! The important thing is that the young seyid has failed in his examinations for the clergy."

Ahmad chose to pretend ignorance. " *Ajab!* How surprising! Where did you get such news, pray tell? "

" The young man in the telegraph office is a son of my sister's husband by his first wife. He told me at noon that the message had just arrived from the capital."

Ahmad sipped his tea in noisy appreciation. " This tea is really excellent today." As the proprietor beamed at his compliment, Ahmad asked, " How does the young man, Seyid Ali, like the news? "

" *Ya Khoda!* Would you believe it, he seems not to care at all! He has ordered his new suit from the tailor and says he will not leave the house until it is ready. He says ' the habit of a dervish is the garment of resignation.' "

" Surely his wife and mother are not so meek! " The steward eyed the proprietor speculatively.

Hassan threw out his hands in a gesture more expressive than many words. " Is it not the women of Iran that prevent progress always? What man dare tell his children the news of the bazaar lest they turn on him and call him infidel! "

Ahmad nodded slowly. " Then there is rebellion in the house of the Motavali. Of what use is that? Can one change one's fate, one's kismet? "

As the men were speaking two women, their street veils held tightly across their faces, passed quickly down the narrow lane at one side of the teahouse. Both men stared at them. They had scarcely turned the corner when Hassan whispered: " The midwives! I recognized them by the needlework extending up to their knees! There is no other veil like it in Kashan! "

" It is well that I sleep here," said Ahmad. " Prepare a pilau of finest rice for my dinner, that I may sleep sweetly and be ready for whatever news the morning may bring."

As the gossiping customers came and went, the nazir sat smoking the gay water pipe, watching but adding little to the conversation. Hours later he lay stretched out on the bench, only a rug between him and the boards, and a heavy comforter covering his head and his body, except for his bare feet, which were exposed to the gentle night breezes. The water, a lazy stream from the spring at Fene, continued to run underneath the bench. Ahmad's sleep was undisturbed by the changes that had begun in Kashan.

Dawn in Kashan came very early. The stars seemed to retire with one accord as the rosy tints lightened the sky. One by one sleepy forms emerged from beneath heavy quilts, stretched, yawned, reached for the ever-present ewer, and disappeared behind some wall, to return presently to sit on their heels beside the stream and wash their faces and hands in the running water. Men began to call to each other across the narrow lane, shrill voices of women were heard, while over and above it all rang out the muezzin's call to prayer.

Ahmad was already walking leisurely up the street to the

door in the wall of the Motavali's garden when he heard the call. He fingered his prayer beads, letting them slip, one by one, through his fingers. He stood for some time before he finally raised the knocker and gave a gentle tap.

Silence. Another gentle knock. He heard someone pulling back the bolt of the door, then it slowly opened and Naneh, closely enveloped in her house veil, stood before him.

" May your morning be blessed! " said Ahmad. " What news is there? "

Naneh's voice from behind her veil was hoarse and sad. " God be praised! His will be done! I have wept for two hours and now I know not what to do."

" Tell me, tell me! What has happened? Why do you weep? Is your mistress dead? "

" No, no! She will live, and the baby. It is very tiny, no more than four pounds, but it will live."

" Then why do you weep? " He grabbed her veiled arm roughly and shook it as a loud sob answered him. " Tell me," he commanded.

" The baby is a girl," sobbed Naneh, " and I dare not tell the young master."

Ahmad dropped her arm and turned away in disgust. " What a fuss about nothing! " He started to leave her.

" Stay! " begged Naneh. " Tell me what to say to him. He has been like a demon all night, shouting that he wanted to sleep and the screaming women would not let him. He pounded the wall again and again; I am afraid he will throw the samovar at me if I am the bearer of such bad news."

Ahmad nodded his head sagely. " And the bazaar said he did not care! Yet he loses his temper at a bunch of crying children! " He thought a moment, then added, " Tell him misfortunes never come singly; tell him the baby, a premature girl, will probably die."

" May God forbid! " said Naneh as she slid the wooden bar once more into place. She walked quickly up the path leading into the *birooni* before her courage should fail.

Seyid Ali was sitting near the samovar table, his head in his hands. At the sound of steps on the gravel, he looked up.

" You! Well, what news now? *Ya Allah!* What shrieks and screams this night! It is a wonder I have any wits."

With downcast head, Naneh waited until he had finished. Then she agreed with him: " Yes, yes. There was much noise, I am sorry." She hesitated, added, " And this time I bear you bad news."

" What! " screamed Ali. " God forbid it is another girl! "

" Yes it is; God's will be done! " said Naneh piously. " The infant will probably die; it is so tiny and only seven months."

Ali rose up in anger, pointed his finger at the woman cringing before him. " Get out of my sight, you bearer of bad news! Am I to be the father of girls only? Am I to walk in the streets of Kashan in the disgraceful clothes of the foreigner with all pointing the finger of scorn at me because I have been disrobed? By his holy Prophet, I will not. I will leave for Teheran as soon as that suit arrives from the tailors. Go see that they finish it quickly! " he ordered.

Naneh had backed away in terror as he was speaking. Now she turned and fled, her veil floating about her like the wings of a great bird as she ran down the garden path and disappeared behind the wall of the *anderun*.

CHAPTER 6

"A LETTER! A LETTER FROM ALI!" TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW, Esmat's tone of joyous surprise revealed how well she had recovered from the shock of Ali's disgrace.

The Motavali's wife had come from her own rooms to deliver Esmat's letter, for she knew its contents must be similar to the verbal message her husband had sent her along with it, and she wanted to hear her daughter-in-law's reaction to the news. Esmat reached for her silver paper knife and cut the envelope carefully — letters from Ali were prized possessions. She realized that her mother-in-law wanted to hear firsthand what Seyid Ali had to say, for the older woman could not read. Esmat did not mind sharing the stereotyped letters whose flowery salutations in the old-fashioned style, still imitated by well-educated letter writers of Iran, lacked any genuine warmth and emotion.

"To my dearly beloved and honored wife, Esmat Khanum," she read aloud. "It is my prayer that you are well and that our children are in good health. I also trust that my mother and father are in their usual good health and that all of you are happy in your home in Kashan. I have news you will be pleased to hear.

"During the week that is finished, His Majesty, the Shah-in-Shah of Iran, visited the military school where I have been training and let his beneficent shadow fall upon his young officers. He was pleased to confer ranks of honor upon us, and your husband, a slave of God, was raised to the position of captain in His Majesty's army. Then, most unexpectedly, His Majesty Shah Riza granted to all who had been made captain a vacation of two weeks, so that we might visit our families

before we are to be assigned to new posts. Therefore I will soon be coming to you, my dear wife, and my honored parents, and you will have, I hope, joy in my return to Kashan. Since I have some work to do first, you are not to expect me until I send you a telegram telling you when I have left Teheran."

Esmat had turned the letter around as she read up the sides and across the deeply indented top, hunting for the signature, and she laughed happily when she found it scrawled within a small circle of scrolls, characteristic of Ali's penmanship.

" He will come some day this week, I believe. Let us start a pilau at once," she said to her mother-in-law.

So they spent the morning in busy preparation until, wearied by their activities, they retired to take their accustomed naps. Esmat told Naneh to bring her tea to her rooms, where now she found herself daydreaming even though there was much she needed to do yet. Even the shouts of children's voices in the garden didn't disturb her reverie.

Was it possible that so many years had passed since Ali had failed in his examinations, since the agony of that night when Parvin was born, since those long days when she had waited and waited, listening for her husband's step in the *anderun?* They had not told her that he had gone; she had not seen him again. The turquoise ring that Naneh had said was a gift from Ali, she had finally realized had come instead from Naneh herself. Again and again she had wished and prayed that she would die rather than see her husband in the disgraceful attire of an infidel. Yet she had not dreamed that he would voluntarily isolate himself from her, that he would feel no call to return to her and his children.

When she learned that Ali had been accepted in officers' training school and wore the uniform of his country instead of the citizens' clothes that they both loathed, she had felt dazed, but finally she had become reconciled to thinking of him as an officer. And when she saw the picture he sent to his family, she had reluctantly admitted that he looked younger without his beard, and more handsome in the military cap than in the traditional turban.

But she had not grown younger, she knew, for who could care for a baby like Parvin, delicate, flowerlike, and winsome though she was, and not grow old with the months? She was glad Parvin had lived, although none of the family, not even her father-in-law, had really cared. It had been Naneh who had shown her how dainty the baby's tiny hands were, who had rocked the cradle to quiet the crying infant so that Esmat might sleep undisturbed, who had secured the wet nurse. It had been Naneh too who told her of the other men in the city who had to wear civilian dress because they had not passed the religious examinations. Esmat had listened and had been comforted, but she could not forget the pain she had suffered that first night of Ali's failure. It had seemed to her that she would prefer him to remain away forever rather than be reminded again of the disgrace of his being disrobed.

Others had told her that a new day had come to Iran, that even the women might have to lay aside their veils. This she and her mother-in-law had vowed they would never do. Never! Never!

And now Ali was coming home again, coming back to her and his children! Would he act like a stranger, distant and forbidding? Or would he be her lover again? She had not thought she could ever forgive him for leaving her so cruelly without a word of farewell, or a good-by kiss. Yet she knew that now she could love him again if — if — if he were only kind to her. Unexpectedly, she found herself remembering the nightingales on her wedding night. . . .

Esmat rose slowly and stood before the mirror. She was no longer slender and childlike, she noted with satisfaction. Surely being plump and matronly would please her husband more — did not all the men of Kashan prefer their women well padded?

She threw open her house veil and stared at her well-rounded form. The short, full ballet skirt, introduced by Muzaffar-ed-Din Shah on his return from Europe many years ago, stood out stiffly around her hips. Her jacketlike blouse was fastened tightly, completely covering the upper part of her body. Suddenly she unhooked it, and critically surveyed her reflection in the mirror. If she were to have another child, what a comfort

the veils of Islam would be! Thank heaven the rumors were false. Such lies as the bazaar spread from time to time! It was possible to make men change their apparel, but what woman would submit to the removal of such a useful garment as the all-enveloping veil of Islam? One scarcely needed to wear anything underneath it save the short, gathered skirt, the long trousers, the overblouse; none of those ever went out of style. Just today five-year-old Effat had begged for a prayer veil like her mother's, and Esmat had promised her one when her father returned from Teheran. She'd better stop this daydreaming and look in her dowry chest for an old veil that could be cut down to fit the little girl. Parvin would want one too before long — they might as well make the two while they were at it. The door at the far side of the room opened and Esmat saw Naneh's reflection in the glass before her.

" Tell me, Naneh, am I still beautiful? Will he want me again after so long a time? " Her voice trembled as she spoke.

Naneh eyed her young mistress critically. " No one would ever believe you were the weak, sickly little girl who married the son of the Motavali. Why, you have put on pounds of flesh in these past few years! "

Esmat flushed. " Then you think he will still love me? "

" In the name of Hezrati Fatima, what more could a man desire than the beauty I see before me? " She backed off to stare again at the plump form before her. " It will be a son this time."

Esmat blushed, fastened her blouse together, and said, " I was going to get the veils for the girls." Turning from the mirror, she led the way to the room where the chests were kept.

In the midst of their task, the two little girls, accompanied by Baji, came running into the room, crying: " Mother! Mother! See what Baji bought us in the bazaar! "

Effat held out a tiny pottery samovar, cups, and saucers, while Parvin carried a little ewer made with the same crude workmanship.

Then the older child noticed the veils on the floor beside her mother. " My prayer veil! " she cried, dropping the little dishes and samovar. She picked up a gay, pink-flowered veil

and draped it over her head, letting it trail behind her as she ran to gaze at herself in the big mirror.

Baji had followed the children into the room. She held a telegram in her hands. " As we passed the masjid, the servant at the door gave this to us. It had just come to the Motavali."

Esmat read the brief message aloud: " Tuesday morning I will start from here." It was signed " Captain Ali Kashani."

The children and their veils were forgotten as the women hurried to their various tasks. Tuesday! Today was Wednesday. He would probably arrive this evening. There was time, for they had put the finest rice to soak as soon as his letter had come. Shredded almonds and pistachios, the tiny pilau raisins and the larger green ones, had all been cleaned, washed, and redried on the roof long ago. Candied orange peel was at hand, of course. The chickens — they were squawking already.

The cook cuffed the ears of the young boy who sat lazily drinking a cup of tea. " Loafer! *Tambal!* Son of a dog! You sit there when there is a world of work to be done! Go at once to the bread shop and have them bake more bread of our finest flour. See to it you don't stop on the way, you lazy son of a burnt father." He gave him another cuff for good speed.

Mohammed ducked under his arm and fled out the door of the garden screaming, " The captain, Seyid Ali, is coming today! "

The gardener heard him and hastily dropped his pruning knife to pick up the sprinkling can, so that the walks and the garden might be cool and fresh when his young master arrived.

Baji called the little girl Talaat to watch the children while she went to the Mujtahid's house to tell her mistress the news. The children had caught the fever of preparation and followed the cook into the kitchen, where they stood entranced at the blood flowing from the headless chickens. Talaat rescued a chicken's head from Parvin, who protested that she wanted to cook too, and dragged the little girl screaming from the kitchen, finally pacifying her with a huge cucumber.

Esmat, hurrying down the steps followed by Naneh carrying a bundle of bath accouterments, paused to kiss her little daughters good-by. They pleaded to be taken with her, but Esmat

was firm. " No! No! I have no time for you today. Zahra is coming to be with you and Talaat. Perhaps she will make you another doll, or tell you a story."

The skillful ministrations of the bath women soothed Esmat. This time there was much sly joking at her expense. She pretended not to hear their remarks, yet she found herself blushing when they speculated whether she would return to the bath on the morrow or not.

" It all depends," said the experienced woman, " whether the captain has had a temporary wife. If he has not, the new moon will not have set before he leaves the men's quarters."

" I will wager you an extra gift that it will make no difference," said Naneh. " The khanum and I will be back here again tomorrow for the purification required by the Koran."

Still Esmat wondered, as the women poured the warm water over her and rubbed her with the scrubbing mitt until her skin glowed like a rose, whether she would be back on the morrow, whether the young captain would love her as the young seyid had. Two years was a long time in Iran, and there were many beautiful, unscrupulous women in the capital — thousands glad to be the temporary wife of a man of as high rank as the son of the Motavali.

As she dressed to leave the bath, she clothed herself in a new garment of pride also, to cover the question she could not answer. " Whether Ali loves me or not, whether he wants me or not, I shall come back here tomorrow," she decided. " Not even Naneh shall know what happens between us. If I did not return, all Kashan would hear about it before nightfall."

The new moon hung suspended in the western sky, its two horns pointed earthward indicating dry weather, and the stars were fast appearing when the sound of a motor horn was heard in the lane. Servants and children rushed to the door of the garden opening into the *birooni,* where they watched a tall uniformed officer stride in from the street. He glanced neither to right nor to left until he had entered the reception room where the Motavali awaited him. His father arose as Ali approached, walked a few steps to meet him, embraced him, and kissed him on both cheeks.

" You have brought joy, my son. Did you have a good journey? Are you very tired? " The older man's voice shook with emotion.

Captain Ali looked down upon his parent as he returned the embrace. Had he really grown taller or had the old man shrunk while he had been gone? Outwardly he gave him the homage due his years and station but there was an arrogance in Ali's gaze that spoke volumes to the older man. Two years had changed his son from an uncertain devotee of Islam, meticulous in the outward observances of his religion, into a military figure with the poise of a commander of men.

The Motavali's judgment was confirmed when he heard the sharp, decisive tones of his son's voice. " Tired? Such a trip is nothing to me." His shoulders unconsciously straightened as he gazed upon his stooped parent and his short laugh held a note of derision. " His Majesty's officers do not know the meaning of the word ' tired '! What have you been doing these past years? Same accounts? Same calls to prayer? Same tasks? Nothing seems to have changed here, only you have grown older. Are you well? "

The Motavali threw his palms upward in the familiar gesture. " Thank God! I am well. Sometimes I am tired, that is all. Yes, I am older. That is natural."

The two seated themselves, and Ali proffered his silver cigarette case, but the old man shook his head. " Yes, yes. Of course you prefer your water pipe at home." Ali clapped his hands and a manservant entered the room with the water pipe with its glowing coals and long colored pipe.

Ali watched his father smoke for a few moments, then he leaned over and extinguished his cigarette. " I'll share your water pipe. It's been years since I tried one! "

With a pleased smile, the older man passed over the pipe and watched his son inhale deeply. " It's a pleasant way to pass the time," said Ali politely. " I used to wonder how people became addicted to it, but I think I see now."

The Motavali asked about the shah's new program — were men objecting to it? Ali replied that universal military conscription was merely following the world pattern; were not all

European countries doing the same? Trained officers were necessary; thousands had volunteered. No, men seemed not to object to the new attire; perhaps one in a hundred thought the military hat with its visor unsuitable for prayers.

" Yes," replied his father. " Yes. They said the same here, but that has been taken care of. They turn the hat backward so the visor cannot touch the prayer seal; do they do the same in Teheran? "

" When they pray," answered his son. " But we do not give them much time for prayers." Now that the conversation had switched to religion, Ali seemed restless. He rose, bowed, and asked to be excused to cleanse himself of the journey's dust.

His father watched him stride from the room. Then he gave orders to have the tables laid for dinner and to prepare for the many guests who would surely honor the family that evening. Scarcely had he finished his directions before they began to arrive. They congratulated the Motavali on the safe return of his son; they bowed low in deference to his rank before seating themselves before the gilt tables loaded with sweetmeats and nuts, the first course of the anticipated feast.

When Ali finally returned, he was spotless in his army uniform, and obviously pleased at being the center of attention. He passed from one to another of his guests, kissing some of the older men, as he had his father, on both cheeks, holding the hands of others in both of his own, near his heart; urging them all to be seated and not to let their tea grow cold before they drank it. He exuded politeness and interest in the business each man represented; he inquired politely for their children; but he disdained to add his opinion of the Government's plan when the conversation drifted to that absorbing topic.

The Motavali watched his son with increasing anxiety, for underneath Ali's suave politeness he sensed his scorn of his birthplace, his village companions; his inner restlessness. He was relieved when the appearance of Ahmad, the nazir, in the doorway indicated that the dinner was served in the opposite room.

After half an hour the group returned to the reception room and were served tiny cups of black coffee. Then, and not till

then, the old man yawned, signifying to his guests that the time for departure was at hand. Ali yawned too, and looked at his wrist watch ostentatiously. The men took the hint and made their farewells.

As the last one left, the Motavali turned to his son. "Whether you admit it or not, you too must be tired. Let us retire."

Ali murmured that he hoped his father would sleep well, bade him good night, and disappeared down the garden path in the direction of the *anderun.*

Silence fell in the soft, shadowy night. The servant placed a lighted lamp in the hallway and the men's apartments sank into quietness and peace. Yet the Motavali lay staring out into the night, lost in thought, wondering what the future held for a young man cut adrift from his ideals, his training, and his religion, linked only by a chain of twenty-four months of rigid discipline to the military program of the day. He had taken off his turban. His small skullcap of black needlework interwoven with white Persian script seemed to accentuate the questioning look of his eyes as he lay on the hard pillow. At length he sighed deeply, turned on one elbow, and removed his false teeth. He laid them on a dish near his head; then he closed his eyes to the starlight, and the night breezes blew gently over the face of a tired old man asleep.

As Ali quietly opened the door of the women's quarters, he glimpsed a veiled form slipping through the shadows near the path leading to the servants' rooms.

Naneh, he thought. *That snooping old woman! She waited to see whether I went to Esmat's rooms.* In Teheran there had been no one to spy on him — only old Fati to feed him, and she was always asleep when he returned from late meals with his friends. Kashan ways exasperated him. He would speak to Esmat about Naneh tonight.

Ali turned the handle of the porch door gently and entered the room where a kerosene lamp cast a soft yellow light on Esmat. Her eyes were dark with emotion as she saw him. But Ali did not notice her eyes; he saw rather her hair in its many

small braids, the lace veil, her old-fashioned dress. Why did people in Kashan never change? Naneh exactly as when she first came to be with her mistress — snooping and prying; Esmat just like a wide-awake child with that lace veil pinned over her ears. A little fatter, perhaps, but not at all like the women in Teheran.

" Ali! You have come again! " Esmat tried to rise to welcome him, but he reached over and blew out the lamp, saying: " That old woman of yours is still snooping about. Why don't you train her better? "

Esmat gave a low laugh. " Naneh? Never mind. She does it because she loves me so — and she is afraid — " Her voice died away as he touched her, caressed her, drank deep from her lips, intoxicated her with his ardor.

In the *anderun,* hours later, dawn rushing into her bedroom awoke Esmat from her slumbers. She raised her head to look at her husband beside her. His gentle breathing told her he was still asleep. She gazed at him closely, for she had scarcely seen him last night before he had blown out the light, and slipped into the bed beside her. How young, how handsome he was! And he still loved her!

Recalling her midnight reunion reminded her of her next duty: the requisite bath. She smiled. No pretense before the bath women would be necessary. Perhaps she could go now without waking Ali and be back again when he was ready for breakfast. She moved cautiously away from her husband, slipped from the bed, picked up her clothes and her veil, and stood a moment at the door. There had been no break in the rhythm of his breathing.

Naneh was folding up her pallet on the porch as Esmat came out of the door. " Let us go to the bath now, before the girls and their father wake up," said Esmat.

" Mashallah! May Allah ward off evil! " said her woman with a pleased smile. " I knew you would need them so I got all the bath things ready last night."

This time there were no lengthy scrubbings, no hair-washing or nail-coloring; Esmat merely stood under the running shower,

letting the water stream over her. When she had fulfilled the requirements of her religion, they returned home to find Ali still sleeping but the little girls playing happily with the new toys they had found beside their pillows.

The servants spread rugs on the bricks of the garden and brought in the samovar, cheese and bread, eggs and honey, tea and milk. They had barely finished when Ali appeared on the porch. Parvin and Effat approached him shyly as he called them. He looked at them critically and patted their heads in approval as they stood before him; then at his command they all seated themselves on the rug and had breakfast together.

An hour later Ali left the world of women and children to return to the *birooni*. Each noon and night of the ten days of his visit he was feted and dined. Usually Esmat was invited too, but she and the other women never entered the men's quarters, never ate until the men had eaten, never discussed the political events that interested the men. Instead, their conversation was filled with talk of births and deaths, of the careful accounts of intimate happenings of their daily lives.

For Esmat, to accompany her husband was as if the doors of paradise had opened and let her glimpse the pleasures within. She blossomed anew, a maturer, more perfect rose instead of the shy violet transplanted from the Mujtahid's secluded garden.

But when Ali left, she drooped and grieved and became more strict in her observance of Islam's laws. It was as if she sensed that her husband had laid aside his religion along with his clerical attire.

It was just as well that she had not seen Ali's cynical smile as he looked upon the city of Kashan the morning he departed. On his way he passed a group of devotees clad in black shirts with the unbuttoned U of the chest open, beating rhythmically on their bare chests with fierce blows of religious fervor. It was a parade of young men led by a priest of Islam. They were carrying symbols too: one, a brass hand; one, the scimitar and its horned moon. Ali put his hand on his sword as the car passed quickly by the parade and muttered to himself: "I have exchanged one sword for another. It may be there is hap-

piness for me under this sword of the Pahlavi dynasty. Certainly I never found it under the sword of Islam."

He was gone. Time, which had danced for a while to new music, marched on with its usual slow tread, changing as the seasons changed: panting through the hot summer months, crawling leisurely through the cooling autumn, drowsy and slow in the chilly winter, galloping again in the lovely spring days until a year had passed.

Esmat stood looking down at the lace-trimmed cradle of her three-months-old son. She had resumed her normal life again, but excitement still reigned in the house, for after the birth of two daughters endless tales were told about this remarkable event. As she looked back on it, the days telescoped together, each one adding to the picture:

The day her father-in-law brought her the letter from Captain Ali. How proud he had been in the birth of his son! He had specified that his name should be Ali Naqi. Everyone had agreed that no better name could have been chosen, for was he not Ali, born of Ali, in very truth?

The day she had first gone to the bath, when Ali Naqi was fifteen days old. The tales the bath woman had told her of the joy that had reached even to Teheran. For had not the son of the bath woman been a servant with Captain Ali and had he not been sent back bearing gifts for the mother and her new son? The boy had told them how the telegraph messenger had brought the news to him, the captain's servant. He had tipped him two rials and when the captain had come home he had cried: "*Bisharat!* Good news!" And he had kept his hand extended until he was given twenty rials!

The bath woman had shaken her head at that point and had said reproachfully to Esmat: "You know it should have been fifty rials at least for the news of a boy! Even a poor man gives twenty rials for the news of the birth of a son!"

Esmat had recognized the plea for a larger present and had given double the usual tip when she left.

Her reminiscences were ended suddenly by a cry from the cradle, and she leaned over to pick up her son. Naneh rushed

into the room and nearly pushed Esmat away in her eagerness to scoop the baby in her arms before his mother could take him. " What are you doing to him? " she cried. " Don't you touch him unless I give him to you. What do you know about babies? "

CHAPTER 7

ESMAT'S JOYS IN HER SON WERE SHARED BY ALL IN THE HOUSEhold, especially her husband's mother. He would smile at her when he would only stare at another, and she declared he was the mirrored image of Ali, his father, when he was that age. She rejoiced as he gained in weight and acquired cunning baby ways — different from those of little girls, she said.

It was strange that as Ali Naqi grew fatter and happier, his adoring grandmother grew much thinner. Finally the family noticed her transparent pallor, her exhaustion at the least exertion, and were worried. At first her women said it was her age, and fed her native drugs that should have restored her health at once. Yet the usually busy woman sat listlessly under the *cursie,* the covered brazier, puffing at her water pipe, watching the bubbles dance around in the tall glass jar as she breathed the sweet-scented smoke. Occasionally her women seemed to forget that she had ever been otherwise. Only the Motavali and Esmat noted the difference.

At length the Motavali wrote his son to use his influence to send a skilled physician to Kashan. He even suggested the man: the doctor from the Christian hospital in Teheran, adding that he had heard that this man was born in Iran and had a sincere interest in helping the Persians. He offered to help finance the doctor's trip, but he did not comment to his family on what he had done.

Esmat noted her mother-in-law's increasing weariness and gradually took over the duties the older woman had been accustomed to handle. The Motavali may not have realized it, but Esmat was more concerned than he was. She was present one morning when the older woman had a hemorrhage. Her efforts to stop the flow proving fruitless, she had summoned

Naneh and the other women, who tried various home remedies in vain before they called the old family doctor. While the gardener was hurrying for him, Esmat remembered one of the remedies he had used for nose-bleeding; he had sent them for snow, precious rare snow brought by runners from the mountains, to place on the bleeding person. Now it was just after Nooruz, the beginning of April, and there was no snow, but the cistern water was cold.

" Use compresses, Naneh! Cold water — she will die if we don't do something! "

Feverishly Esmat worked with the women, and apparently one of their sundry remedies was effective, or else the blood stream had clotted, for the bleeding had stopped by the time the Motavali and the doctor arrived.

A long, flowing robe of camel's-hair cloth was thrown over the doctor's frock coat, around which was wound a white sash. In its multitudinous folds were concealed two of the primal remedies of his calling: dried oxtongue flowers, and a mixture of four seeds — wild mustard, plantain, violet, and alyssum. As the two men looked down at the sick woman, she sighed and opened her eyes, weakly insisting that Esmat prop her up and drape her veil over her half-seated body. Not until then did the doctor question her. What had she done? What could have caused this bleeding?

Nothing, insisted the Motavali's wife — it was all due to wind on her stomach.

The doctor held her frail hand a moment, taking her pulse, then returned to his seat. He nodded in agreement and commented: " Winds are of all things the most difficult to treat in this land. But I am skilled in such treatment, as you well know. Trust me! What did you eat yesterday? "

The patient moaned as she moved. " Nothing, really nothing unusual. Just rice-filled eggplant *dolma* and *mast,* the best fermented milk of Kashan."

The doctor was shocked. " God save you! Are you a child that you did not remember not to take *mast* with *dolmas* when you are so ill? You should have used lemon juice instead of sour milk! "

" Certainly that is the reason. Why did I forget? " The patient moaned again.

Naneh, Talaat, and Effat stood in the doorway curiously watching the events within. The doctor spoke to the group: " Get me a paper, a reed pen, and some ink."

When Talaat came back with the writing materials, the doctor wrote, mumbling each word as he did so:

" Sacred myrrh of Mecca
Dried sap from the herb of Iran, anguseh.
Dried leaves from the spicey water plant: souda.
Black pepper.

" Pound equal quantities of these together; take twice their combined weight of honey; make pellets of the mixture. Dosage: Several pellets daily to relieve pain."

When he had finished, he waved the paper to dry the ink, then folded it and handed it to the Motavali, who passed it to Esmat, who in turn gave it to Naneh. He addressed the women: " When you get the medicine, give it at once with a tea glass of water; then have her drink several glasses of tea." He turned to the Motavali, added: " The midwives of Iran sometimes tie a cord tightly about the breast of such a woman; they might try that too. And sometimes they roast willow-tree wormwood mulch, and pack it inside. There is no harm in trying these ancient cures, if the drug I have given is ineffective. But I think she will be better tomorrow."

As he started to leave, the sick woman sneezed once, twice, and moaned again with pain. But the group were delighted. " She has sneezed twice! She will recover," cried Naneh.

The doctor had risen and now bowed stiffly to the veiled woman, put his hand over his heart in farewell to the Motavali, and left the room, followed at a respectful distance by Naneh, who closed the garden door after him.

A few minutes later, clad in her black street chuddar, she was ready to go for the prescription, but Esmat called to her: " Wait for me, Naneh! The druggist will give fresher drugs if I watch him. My father-in-law will stay with his wife while we are gone."

When the two women, carefully covered by their black veils, reached the druggist's little shop, they found the doctor there, seated cross-legged, smoking the druggist's water pipe. The druggist was out and his young apprentice was in charge of the shop. At the approach of a wealthy customer, and he knew by Esmat's dress that she was wealthy, that wise lad jumped up and ran off in search of his master.

" It is well I came," said Esmat to Naneh. " They would have let you wait an hour."

" *Bali, bali.* And the khanum needs her medicine at once."

Soon the druggist appeared, followed by his eager-eyed apprentice. It was quite evident that the man was greatly excited. His beard was ruffled, his shaggy eyebrows uplifted, and his hands trembled as he took the prescription. " For the Motavali? " he asked. " The boy will bring it to the house; you need not wait."

But Naneh's curiosity was aroused by his strange behavior. She whispered to her mistress, " Tell him you need it."

Esmat took the cue, saying: " It is urgent. We will wait for you to fill it. We want your best and freshest drugs."

The druggist was impatient. " Do not wait! I promise you the best I have."

But Naneh interrupted him, " What has happened that you are so upset? "

" Go, I say, go! You are a woman! What do you know of the world? " He turned aside and whispered to the doctor, " Have you heard the news? "

But the doctor saw no reason for secrecy. " What news is this? " he asked.

By this time the druggist could contain himself no longer; his sibilant whisper could be heard by all passing: " An American Christian doctor has come to Kashan."

This was indeed news. Esmat forgot her hurry, Naneh let her veil drop open, and her mouth too, in surprise. The doctor grew pale as he asked, " How does he happen to be here? "

" It is said that the first families of Kashan sent a request asking him to come."

The doctor was really disturbed now. He threw out his

hands, palms upward, and burst into a tirade against foreigners. " What can those infidels know of the nature of the diseases of the Persians? What do they know about the effect of odors on our people? How do they know what foods are warm, what cold? They think it means temperature, while we know it is the reaction on the blood that brings heat or cold! We know our own people; they do not! "

As he finished his tirade, silence fell on the little group. A moment later a string of donkeys loaded with beets entered their covered road. After it came the driver, singing a high-toned song of joy. Both men watched him as he disappeared around a corner. A black-robed mollah came into view as the last donkey disappeared.

Esmat started when she noticed the religious man. " I know what you must do! You must cut the Koran! " she cried.

The doctor looked at the druggist. " She is right."

All of them called excitedly to the mollah. When he understood their request, the priest of Islam asked for a copy of the Koran. The druggist reached up to a curtained recess in his shop wall and carefully removed a tapestry-covered copy of their sacred book. He unwrapped it and reverently handed it to the mollah, who kissed it, made mysterious signs over the unopened book, passed his hand lovingly over its embossed covers, turned it around twice, and finally opened it. He ran his right forefinger from the top to the middle of the page, turned it over, and read aloud:

" On the day of that decision, the faith of the infidels shall not avail them . . . and they shall have no further respite. Stand aloof from them, then, and wait thou, for they too wait."

His listeners stared at him open-mouthed. The druggist and the doctor leaned over and followed the slowly moving finger, nodding their heads as the mollah paused. " See! How wisely speaks our Book! "

Esmat was triumphant. " It was I who told you to cut the Koran," she cried exultantly.

The mollah silenced her with a warning forefinger. " Be still! I have not finished." He turned the pages once more and read:

" They who treat the Book and the message which we have sent as a lie, shall know the truth hereafter."

Again he turned the pages:

" When the collars shall be on their necks, and the chains to drag them into Hell, then in the fire shall they be burned."

And once more he turned the leaves and read:

" So make war on them; by your hands will God chastise them and put them to shame, and will give you the victory over them and heal the bosoms of the people who believe."

Carefully the mollah closed the Koran and returned it to the druggist. Then he cast his eyes heavenward and cried in a loud voice: " We have our answer! We shall do as Mohammed, on him be peace, blessed be his name, commands us. Go," he commanded the men, " go tell the boys and the loiterers in the streets that Mohammed, God bless his name, peace be on his soul, bids us declare war on the infidels."

The two men hesitated. The doctor asked, " Shall it be in the open, or secretly? "

" Are we not instructed to do such work secretly? Let it be done carefully that the merchants who are friends of this man may not know that we have a hand in it. May God punish them for thinking more of their bodies than their souls! They have brought perdition on themselves." He ostentatiously held out his hand. The doctor and the druggist fumbled in their sashes and each brought out a silver coin which they placed on the outstretched palm.

When Esmat returned home, she found her father, the Mujtahid, who had come to inquire for the sick woman, having lunch with the Motavali. She told them both the news she had learned.

The Motavali cleaned his fingers on a piece of bread before he spoke. " Thank God he has come," the Motavali said.

" But he is a Christian! " cried Esmat and Naneh. " Would you have a Christian treat a Moslem? "

" My wife is dying; shall I let her die if a Christian can

save her? "

They were silenced. *He is right,* Esmat thought. *I don't want her to die. I love her almost as much as Ali* — She listened to the plans of the two men. It had been suggested that the quarters of the deceased robber Nyab Hussein would be a fitting place for the new doctor. And if, as rumor had it, women and children had accompanied him, there were plenty of rooms for all. Had not Nyab Hussein kept a dozen or more wives in that same garden?

The medical party had been in Kashan some days before the doctor was invited to the Motavali's home. When he arrived in the *anderun,* Esmat watched him from the curtained doorway. She saw him look at the patient's tongue, feel her pulse, question her briefly, and then depart with the Motavali. Strange drugs, stranger directions followed.

All was done as he ordered, but still the woman did not seem to get better. The women servants and Esmat wondered why, in God's name, the Motavali permitted the doctor to remain. Was he not the most powerful Moslem of Kashan? Was it not his duty to drive out the infidels? The fanatical women, especially Esmat's own mother, could not comprehend his leniency.

Yet as time passed they grew reconciled to seeing the strangers about. Esmat even permitted Naneh to go with a relative of hers who had had a white pearl growing in one eye for years. The Christian doctor removed it, keeping the patient several days in the clean, bare ward, where Naneh visited her and reported all about the strangers to her mistress. One of the foreign women was plump, dark-eyed, and beautiful. She spoke the language of the people perfectly and any man would desire her for a wife! But the other woman! She was a strange creature, wearing glasses like an old dervish, and she could speak only a few words of Persian. Neither of them had any modesty, for both appeared with their faces uncovered and their bare hands exposed to public gaze!

Another woman, a Persian, came with them. She was a companion, a friend, who often read the Book of the Christians to those waiting to see the doctor. At first the women were afraid

of her — why did she do this? Was she a Christian herself? Naneh asked her one day, and she smiled and replied: "Yes, I am. And you would be too if you listened to the teachings and saw the miracles the doctor performs in the name of the Christ."

Naneh's reports interested Esmat so much that she was anxious to invite the women to her home and perhaps be invited in return to their rooms in the Nyab Hussein's garden. But she must be cautious lest the presence of the Christians influence her son in some way, her Ali Naqi, the son and heir of the Motavali's son, and the grandson of Kashan's most learned teacher of mollahs, the Mujtahid, her own father.

Her caution took a strange form. Her mother-in-law continued to grow worse — perhaps the Christian doctor had cast an evil eye on her. It would be well to call in the Rozah Khan to exorcise this evil. Through Naneh she learned that the doctor's women, as they were called by all, liked to learn about Persian customs. How better could she entertain them than by asking them to listen to the intoning of prayers for the sick?

So one Friday Esmat invited the Christian women and children from America, and even the Iranian Christian, Shamsi, to tea. They talked of things that interest all women: husbands and babies and children; cooking and sewing and styles; and then, in a pause of the conversation, the doctor's wife told one of the stories of the Christ — the tale of the Lost Coin. In the silence that followed, Shamsi explained to the women what was meant by it. Esmat was doubly glad that she had hired the Rozah Khan — he would present her religion to these strangers as they had theirs to her.

At Esmat's bidding, Naneh led the blind man into the room. He stood near the wall, a pathetic sight, for he had one empty sunken eye socket, one roving white eyeball in the other socket. The women of Kashan paid little attention to his entrance, for he was familiar to all of them, but the foreigners gasped with surprise and horror at his sudden appearance. The Rozah Khan had been told of the visitors, and, with an uncanny sense of its fitness, he sang a sacred song about Jesus walking in the desert. Shere Khan, a mighty lion, told Jesus that he must not walk

there; that spot of the desert was sacred ground where Mohammed and his grandsons were to come and one be slain. Jesus, in deference to the Greater One who was to follow him, withdrew from the desert. The Prophet of Islam came many years later and that which was foretold took place: one grandson was martyred in that very spot. He followed this with a song of sorrow for the martyrs of Islam and the women added their wails to those of the Rozah Khan.

It was late afternoon before the guests were permitted to leave, then only after Esmat had persuaded the doctor's wife to look in on the sick woman a moment, though she pleaded her ignorance of medicine. Naneh had told Esmat about hearing Shamsi pray for the sick too, so when they returned from the sick woman's room, Esmat asked her to pray for her mother-in-law.

Shamsi looked questioningly at the doctor's wife, who said simply, " I will pray " — and offered a sentence prayer that if it might be his will, God would heal the sick one in the name of Christ, whom they served here in Kashan. Esmat was astonished at the simplicity of prayer by a Christian. How could one's prayer be acceptable unaccompanied by prostrations?

During the next days the entire family watched the sick woman closely. If the Christians could cure so many, why did not this particular invalid show improvement? At length Esmat told Naneh to ask the woman servant of the doctor's wife why the doctor was unable to help them. Naneh finally brought back word that the disease of Esmat's mother-in-law was cancer, too advanced for a cure. She also reported that the Christians were leaving the next day.

It was Ahmad, the nazir, who brought home the tale of the thousands who had visited the meeting held by the Christian evangelist, a Persian, the night before the party left for Teheran. He told them of the petition signed by five hundred of the first families of Kashan asking the foreigners to open a hospital in their city. The merchants promised gifts of land and money, yet the answer to the petition was negative; the Christians were sorry, but there were not enough doctors to open new work.

So the tears of the women, and the prayers for the sick, and the visits of the Christians to the home of the Motavali availed nothing. The beloved patient grew more helpless daily. Finally the Motavali telegraphed for his son. The night before Ali's arrival, huge kettles of rice and meat sauce were prepared and distributed to the poor, that their prayers and blessings might be showered on the grieving household.

Ali's mother was dying when he arrived. She had asked that her grave linen, purchased years before and sent to Mecca to be dipped in the holy waters of the well Zemzem, be brought to her side. Her transparent hands lay contentedly on it for a few moments, then she motioned her son to move her body.

Ali and his father gently moved the dying woman's bed so that her feet pointed toward Qibleh. A moment later her breath came in one long sigh, and her spirit, bound for so many months to her pain-racked body, left its earthly habitat.

Her sister and her daughter-in-law closed the blank eyes, put the sacred *torbat,* the clay from Mecca, in her mouth, bound the facecloth in position, and tied the big toes together. Her husband and son, assisted by the other male relatives, lifted the body, then gently laid it down; once more they raised it, only to replace it again; the third time they quickly bore it out of the house to the place where she had previously requested that it be washed.

The women washers of the dead began their task as Esmat and the older women relatives appeared with the burial linen and the precious personal insignia; suras of the Koran in small green velvet cases, sacred Islamic emblems she had used so often; her clay tablet from Kerbela, worn smooth by her many kisses; the beads she was wont to tell before evening prayers. All these were secreted in the grave linen which was wound round and about the emaciated body.

When all was finished and the stiffly bound corpse was ready to lay on its wooden stretcher, the men of the family appeared. They said special prayers for the dead, then lifted the body and laid it on the bier, which they carried high on their shoulders to the desolate cemetery outside the city walls.

While they hurried along, the men in front chanted: "*La*

Illahi il Allah. There is no God save Allah!"

As the sound died away, those in the rear answered the same: " *La Illahi il Allah.* There is no God save Allah! "

The women of the family turned back to the house, for they never accompanied their menfolk on this sad journey — only the dead woman's childhood nurse followed the group. When the funeral procession reached the cemetery, they repeated the raising and lowering of the body three times before it was finally entrusted to the open grave.

The grave attendant, who was a mason, carefully built up a brick roof over the head of the corpse, filling the interstices with moistened clay to make the arch secure. When he had covered the head so that it could not be seen, he reached underneath the brick arch, unbound the face of the dead woman, and turned it to face Qibleh. Then he shook the corpse gently while the reader of the burial service, an elderly man, sitting near the open grave, read from his book of prayers.

" Listen! Understand! " Again the reader repeated: " Listen! Understand! " The living were as silent as the dead while he continued: " Listen! Understand! O slave of God, O daughter of a slave of God, are you still faithful to your belief that God is one and has no partner, that Mohammed is his prophet and the last of the holy prophets, that Ali and his eleven sons are the true imams?

" O daughter of a slave of God! When the two angels of God come for you and ask you concerning your God and your Prophet, your Book, your Qibleh and your belief in the appointed ones who followed Mohammed, do not fear! Say in reply to his questions: God is great; He is my Creator; Mohammed is my Prophet; Islam is my religion; the Koran is my Holy Book; Kaaba is my Qibleh; *Ali, ibn abu Talib,* is my pontiff.

" Know this, daughter of God: God Almighty, creator of all, is the excellence of perfection, the perfect Allah. Mohammed is his faultless Prophet; Ali with his eleven sons are the true imams.

" What Mohammed brought is truth. Death is truth and questions at the grave are true and correct; awakening and

ascension of the dead is a true fact; the assembly of the dead is rightful; the one bridge over which they must pass to paradise is ours, the true bridge; certain is judgment and true; paradise is assured and hell is a certainty.

" There is no doubt about this: God will raise us up. Did you understand, O daughter of a slave of God? "

When he finished the service, the shaking of the corpse ceased also.

Then the grave attendant completed the bricking over the body and climbed out of the grave and he and all the men present began filling it in. When finally it was heaped high and rounded over, it was sprinkled to lay the dust and a stone was placed at each end. One by one the men recited the first and the last verses, the suras of the Koran, tapping the grave gently meanwhile. Then they walked seven steps away and returned three times, each time tapping the grave and repeating the well-known suras.

Their duties accomplished, the mourners returned to the city. The Motavali gave orders for the repetition of the customary prayers for the dead. But he did not share in them; he sat alone with his son, grieving for the passing of his true and faithful wife.

Esmat's hands had helped tie the toes of the dead woman; her hands had touched the closed eyes; it was she who had borne the gravecloth to the women washers of the dead. Once more unclean, she and the old nurse and Naneh went to the bath. When the cleansing rites were over, they returned home and prepared the room for the expected visitation of the spirit of their loved one. Food, drink, and cherished possessions were placed there, and a lamp was kept burning throughout the night. Each evening for three days, the food and drink were changed. After the third day's rites, the room was thoroughly cleaned and accepted again for its usual purpose. One week after the funeral the women carried the *halva,* the sweetmeat, to the grave and distributed it, along with the bread they also brought, to the poor who had followed them.

The day after the funeral the male relatives and friends of the deceased came to pay their respects to the men of the

household. All day the Motavali and his son sat in silence broken only by the recitation of verses from the Koran, by a mollah or by one of the dervishes of Kashan, and the coming and going of the visitors. Only night caused the stream of silent sympathy to cease.

The women likewise received their friends for seven days after the death. Esmat and her sister and their relatives, clad in deep black veils, wailed and beat their heads upon the rug on which they sat. Esmat's pale face was scratched with long red marks where she had used her nails in her agony of sorrow the night following her mother-in-law's death. Now new bruises showed dark on her forehead where she had beaten it on the floor. When it came time to leave, the women gathered in little groups in the garden and discussed the mourning. All agreed that never had they seen a daughter-in-law who so truly showed her love and respect for her husband's mother. God would bless her for this, they said.

CHAPTER 8

ONLY ONE DUTY BROUGHT ESMAT COMFORT — HER RESPONSIbility to her small son. For him she drank and ate; for him she restrained her sorrow. When the seven days of bitterest mourning were ended, Esmat delighted in her husband's joy in his namesake. Ali tried to pretend indifference, but she saw pride in his face as he admired the sturdy perfection of his six-month-old son.

When his leave expired, Esmat begged to go to Teheran with Ali. He answered her abruptly, shedding the tenderness of the past ten days like the camel's-hair coat he used for his journeys.

"What would I do with you in Teheran? I am up at dawn and out to the parade grounds and I don't return until sunset — or midnight, if His Majesty demands it."

"But you have room — we would not disturb you."

"Room, yes. It takes more than room for a family of five and three servants; it takes money — more money than a captain can afford."

"Your father will provide it; my father will help. Ali, my beloved, my husband! I miss you so; I am so lonely." She looked mournfully out of the window, wiping away the tears that seemed habitual these days.

Ali had not the slightest intention of taking her, and he told her so in no uncertain terms as he stamped across the room to the door. Just as he opened it, Naneh entered with Ali Naqi. He stood aside a moment, and Esmat pleaded again: "But your son will be growing — you won't see him at all when he is sweetest. Take us with you!"

The slamming of the door was his only answer.

"Will he take you with him?" asked Naneh eagerly.

But Esmat was already regretting her request; perhaps Ali would not come to the *anderun* tonight, and he was leaving in the morning! She vented her anger on Naneh. " You did not need to come in just then. He might have stayed with me longer — " Yet in her heart she knew her pleading had been useless.

She was surprised and glad when he came to her that night. Resolving to say no more about going with him, she talked instead of the baby; how he was beginning to look like his father, how he would soon start to talk and crawl over the floor. Ali said little, but the next morning he kissed her tenderly when he left at dawn. He called back from the car, " One day I will send for you and the children."

He was gone — and the days of mourning, even the forty days, were gone too, and there were only occasional breaks in the monotony of life in Kashan. Now and then a letter from Ali — in reply to Esmat's frequent ones, which never satisfied her — and a note from Shamsi and the Christian doctor's wife who had learned of the death of Esmat's mother-in-law.

" It is kind of them," she said to Naneh.

" Read the letters to me," begged the woman.

Esmat read them aloud, then decided to answer the one from Shamsi. Through her she would send messages to the doctor's wife. " One could scarcely be a friend of a foreigner," she said. " It is different writing to one who really is Persian and can understand both what I say and what I don't say! "

But with all its slow pace, time did not stop. It was September and Ali Naqi was nine months old, actively crawling everywhere. Even though the hot summer had not been easy for the children, the little boy had gained weight; he was plump and healthy — not rosy, but Esmat thought he would be when the autumn winds blew down from the mountains again. Only one thing disturbed her: Ali Naqi made no attempt to stand. Sometimes she worried about this, but as the winter came on and it was necessary to keep him bundled up in his *gondak,* his swaddling clothes, she soon forgot it again.

It was the middle of winter and Ali Naqi was one year old, when word came from his father that she and the children could

join him in the month of Nooruz. Surely Ali's letter could mean but one thing: he was now a major, whose hours were more or less under his own control and he wanted a home of his own again after five years of military life. Pride and curiosity to see his small son must have conquered at last.

The days and weeks flew by as Esmat planned for the journey to the capital. Her boredom gone, she reveled in the busyness of preparations. Finally the time of departure had come and gone; then the major portion of the journey was finished and Esmat and her party were nearing the great city of her dreams.

They had stopped for breakfast near Dehabad. As they prepared to leave the car Esmat heard the whining tones of a beggar near her ear: " In the name of God and his Prophet, give me money for bread. I have eaten nothing today." Looking up quickly, she saw a woman with her hands already inside the window pulling at the baby's clothes. The face and hands of the woman were covered with running sores.

Esmat jerked the baby away. " What are you doing? " she cried in alarm. " Ahmad! Naneh! Talaat! Get this beggar away from here."

Ahmad and Naneh came rushing from the teahouse; Talaat followed with the girls. They pushed the beggar forcibly aside.

" In the name of God! Would you bring your filthy body near the grandson and heir of the Motavali of Kashan? " cried Naneh.

" I have nothing," answered the whining woman. " Give me money for bread and tea. I have eaten nothing today."

Esmat fumbled with her purse and handed it to Naneh. " Give her some money — buy her some tea. She does look hungry! "

The beggar's whines turned to blessings when she found a two-rial piece in her hand and she betook herself to the shade of a mud hut some distance away where she watched the group leave the car and enter the teahouse. When they had almost finished eating, Esmat said to her daughter: " Take some of our eggs and bread to that beggar, Effat. She seems really sick, poor woman! We must be kind to her for her good wishes may bring

us luck."

Before they departed, they left tea and all the uneaten food near the woman. Soon the fast-moving car carried them farther and farther away from the unkempt beggar.

Now the snow covered ranges of the Elburz mountains receded and the nearer hills grew in height as shadows brought out their ruggedness. Demavend towered majestically in the rear and the golden dome of the Mosque at Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim glowed in the early morning sun.

The car hurried past the donkeys laden with garden produce, past the slowly moving camels, past the cemetery with its stones slanting at every angle, into the southeast gate of Teheran. As they waited in the shade of the old tiled and arched entrance to the city, their road passes were examined briefly by the gendarmery officials. But the delay was brief, for military cars were rarely detained for lengthy questioning.

At length the automobile turned into a narrow lane and stopped before a green door, which opened quickly at the sound of the horn. Fati appeared with screams of joy to grab Ali Naqi from Naneh's arms and cover him with kisses and two men in army uniform began to unload the car at once. Esmat was informed that the major was not at home, but would come at noon; everything was prepared for their lunch.

Then Ali really was a major!

The girls ran about the new home chattering like the magpies they had seen on the way; the baby laughed with joy, happy to be out of the crowded car; Esmat exclaimed with pleasure at the modern furniture, calling Naneh to admire everything with her. Fati pointed out the Parliament garden just over the wall. Its beautiful plane trees were casting short noontime shadows when Ali arrived.

Ali Naqi was playing on the floor when his father came in. He picked him up and kissed him on both cheeks, remarking to Esmat who hurried to greet him: " How he has grown! Now I know it has been a long time since I saw him."

" Yes! He is fifteen months old now! And isn't he big and fat and healthy? " But Ali Naqi, frightened by this strange man's embrace, began to cry and pull away from his father.

" Why does he cry? He is not sickly, is he? You had a good journey, didn't you? "

" Yes, it was fine! Ali Naqi is tired, that's all. Give him to me! "

Reluctantly, Ali surrendered his squirming son. Sitting on the floor, facing the windows, Esmat gave him her breast to quiet him. The strong noon light shone on her newly washed face, her cheeks glowed with sunburn and wind, and her eyes were filled with the excitement of her recent arrival. Although her front hair had been recently combed, under the lace veil of her *charqat* her many small braids were tousled and untidy.

Ali settled himself in a chair and, lighting a cigarette, studied his wife, his daughters, and his son with sharp, half-closed eyes. He smiled as he listened to tales of the journey and their reactions to the city — the wonderful city. She had not grown up at all, this child wife of his from Kashan.

Esmat was talking rapidly: " The chauffeur and Ahmad said the golden dome we saw was the Mosque of Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim! He said women from Teheran often went there on the foreigner's train. Have you ever ridden on it, Ali? "

" Many times," said Ali. " It is a good place for picnics."

" Will you take us sometime? I want to ride in the train — and say my prayers in that mosque! "

Her husband was amused. " Here you are, scarcely arrived, and want to go somewhere already! "

" But there is so much I must see that you have seen so often! "

" Hasn't Ali Naqi finished nursing? " Ali laid down his cigarette. " Give him to me now." He reminded her of her duties: " Is lunch almost ready? I have to be back at two, you know."

He took the boy, while she hurried to see if the servants had remembered what she had forgotten — food for a man, a major!

How proud she was of that title! How splendid Ali looked — how straight and how tall! How good life was at last! But she caught her breath as she turned and saw Ali trying to make his son walk on the porch. Would he notice it too? Was it real — or only her imagination?

Finally the long first day came to an end. All the children were sound asleep and even Esmat's head was drooping when Major Ali appeared once again.

Esmat woke with a start. "Where were you? We waited supper so long — but the children were so tired I put them to bed. I was afraid something — "

"I was detained," said Ali shortly. "You must never be alarmed if I do not come home promptly. This is not Kashan."

"No, it is not Kashan, but I love it! Don't you? "

And because she was young and enthusiastic and her eyes sparkled with joy at each tale he told her, Ali found her pleasing company. After their meal he followed her into the room where the children were sleeping. Ali looked long at his son. "He is a fine boy. What a perfect little body he has! "

But he did not notice the fear that flashed into Esmat's eyes as he spoke.

"Let us go to bed. It will be dawn before we know it! " said her husband.

When Ali returned the next evening, the baby was cross and tired. Esmat defended her son: "He hasn't become adjusted to his new home yet." Major Ali said nothing, but he watched the child closely.

It was three days later that he asked Esmat, "Hasn't Ali Naqi walked yet? "

Esmat's heart seemed to stop, then raced, beating wildly as her submerged fear raised its head again. "He creeps everywhere like lightning," she replied.

"So I see," said the major. "But the girls walked much earlier, didn't they? "

"Why, yes, they did," she agreed. "But they were small and thin, not like him. He weighs twice what Parvin did! He will be tall like you; his bones are so big! "

Just then Ali Naqi pulled himself to his feet and stood by the chair on the opposite side of the room. His father watched him a moment, then picked him up and stood him on the table. He gave an exclamation of dismay.

Esmat rushed over at the excitement in her husband's voice. "What is it? What are you doing to Ali Naqi? "

Whenever the baby tried to sit down or to creep, his father stood him again on his feet. Finally, he turned to his wife with blazing eyes: " *Ya Allah!* One leg is shorter than the other! " he cried.

" Don't you dare say such a thing! " Esmat's voice shook with vehemence. " It is not true — he is perfect and healthy like you."

She rushed to the table and grabbed her son to her breast. She would have fled from the room, but her husband caught her arm.

" Stay! Put him down on the floor," he ordered. " I must prove this."

But Esmat was afraid of proof. " Naneh! Come here! " she screamed. " He says my baby is not perfect."

Naneh came running. " May Satan's ears be deaf! Ali Naqi is perfect; he is as the Prophet himself in his beauty! "

Major Ali sternly ordered the women to be quiet while he again placed the child on his feet. He stood for perhaps half a minute, then laughingly fell against the pillow nearby. Then his father stretched him out on the floor and pulled his two little legs together while he examined the small body minutely. Ali Naqi began to cry, but his father continued his inspection until suddenly he stood up, saying hoarsely: " There is no doubt about it. One of his legs is shorter than the other."

Without another word he left the room, the excited women, the crying baby, to pace up and down in the garden enclosure.

CHAPTER 9

LIKE A BROKEN VIAL OF KASHAN'S ATTAR-OF-ROSE PERFUME, the happiness of the family was shattered. No breath of its fragrance remained. On that day and the next Esmat and Naneh tried so often to get the baby to walk that he cried at their approach, and whenever his father came near, his cries doubled in vigor. Esmat quarreled with Ali, reiterating the impossibility of her son being anything but perfect.

One week after their arrival, Major Ali insisted on taking his son to the best doctors in the capital. Esmat reluctantly consented, for at length even she had to admit that Ali Naqi stood unevenly and his attempts to walk were ludicrous.

"Like a duck! He walks like a duck!" cried Effat and Parvin.

Their second week in Teheran was filled with visits to distinguished Iranian doctors. The baby grew to hate the sight of the automobile which bore him to new places and new tortures of examination. To the distressed mother it seemed that the doctors were allied against her; they all declared that the condition probably had been present since birth and that there was no remedy in Iran for such a congenital defect.

The father recalled tales of relatives in the family of the Mujtahid who had been afflicted with defects or abnormalities and accused Esmat of this also. He rarely came to the *anderun* now, spending his evenings in the men's garden with his military friends.

Esmat refused to believe that there was no Persian remedy for Ali Naqi's condition. While her husband was busy at the Ministry of War headquarters, she secretly consulted with a bonesetter who was renowned for his ability. When he recommended a poultice of egg whites mixed with certain potent

drugs, she permitted the little limb to be pulled and bound so tightly that Ali Naqi screamed with distress and anger.

That evening Major Ali had heard the crying baby and had come into the *anderun* and torn off the bandages and flung them away. The blue beads that Naneh had sewn on his dress were torn off too, and flung far across the garden. The *bazu-band*, with its silver prayer case, fastened to the little arm apparently escaped his notice. Yet even the holy prayers availed nothing. Ali Naqi's leg remained as it was the day his father first discovered it.

Twelve days after their arrival Major Ali strode into the *anderun* and announced that he was taking his son to the Christian hospital for examination.

Esmat burst into hysterics, screaming and tearing her hair. " Not to the Christians! " she cried. " The Christians must not touch him, they must not! They could not help your mother! "

But her husband ignored her protests. His personal servant picked up the crying baby and started to the car.

" Naneh! Get me my veil," cried the mother. " I am going too." With her unkempt hair and tear-stained eyes covered by the all-enveloping black veil of Islam, Esmat flung herself into the car.

Naneh wrung her hands, moaned, and wept as she rocked back and forth on her heels in the basement room. Fati kept her company, and their wails filled the little yard with weird sounds. The two little girls, horrified and excited by these new events, crouched trembling in a corner with Talaat, listening to the tales of jinn and evil spirits that she told them. Could it be that a jinni, a wicked jinni, had actually entered their home and touched Ali Naqi? that a jinni had caused him to walk in such a funny way?

Effat began to chill with fever. She cowered under the quilts in the corner certain that the jinn would touch her too. Parvin, too young to understand, wept in sympathy.

Night came. The car returned without Esmat or the baby. The message that came to the *anderun* was that Naneh was to go to the Christian hospital with bedding and food for the two women. The remaining servants gathered under the light in the

garden and fabricated tales as to what might have happened in the Christian hospital. Parvin clung to Talaat's hand on the edge of the group, but no one gave a thought to little Effat shaking with fever and fear in the corner.

When Naneh reached the strange hospital, she found her mistress kneeling beside a small bed on which her son lay fretting. Esmat's veil had fallen back; her eyes were wide and she stared at Naneh unseeingly until her woman touched her on the shoulder.

" What have they done? " she asked. " In Allah's name, tell me! "

Esmat tragically pulled back the covers and exposed her son's small body fastened securely to a spinal board and with a plaster cast covering his leg and hip — the short leg stretched sideways at an unnatural-looking angle.

" Twelve months! They say twelve months like this! And they won't promise a cure at all," she cried despairingly.

Naneh's eyes mirrored her mistress's horror and dejection as she stared at the immobile little form.

Back in the *anderun,* Fati and Talaat offered some of the cold food left from lunch to Parvin and to Effat, who refused to leave her quilt. Parvin also refused to eat, but she sobbed so loudly with excitement and fear that Talaat left her own supper to crawl under the covers with the two sisters, who clung to her in fear of the jinn she had peopled the house with. At midnight Effat's fever rose and with it came delirium. Her screams aroused the little nursemaid, who tried to quiet her and became so frightened herself when she could not soothe her that she screamed in terror for Fati.

Fati brought the lantern closer, and its rays picked up and accentuated with deep shadows the crimson face of the delirious child. She summoned Major Ali.

He refused to go to the room where his daughter was. " You have frightened her with your tales of jinn," he cried. " I could hear you myself. Women and children! What a plague they are! "

He tried to go back to sleep, but Fati would not let him. " She is sick! " she insisted. " We must have a doctor."

" Send Ahmad! " His anger flared. " Get away and let me sleep. Don't you know I have to be at the officers' school at dawn lest His Majesty appear? " He pushed her away, and was relieved when he heard voices in the garden and knew she had sent Ahmad as he ordered.

He tried to sleep again, but sleep had fled. After tossing for a while, he threw off his covers impatiently and got up to see for himself what had happened. He was standing beside Effat's pallet when the doctor arrived.

" What has happened? Is it possible the child is really sick? I thought it was hysterics again — "

The doctor too was surprised. He had been here twice since the family had arrived from Kashan and this third time had insisted on being paid his fee before he would leave his comfortable bed. " *Ajab!* It is surprising to me also." He knelt on the floor beside the restless patient. " Open her dress," he ordered the woman.

Fati complied with his command and she and Talaat gasped as they saw the bright-red spots all over the fevered body.

" Smallpox! " pronounced the doctor. " Why was she not vaccinated? "

Fati and Talaat were indignant. " She was vaccinated! It took, too! " Talaat pulled up the sleeve of Effat's dress. Yes, there were the big scars on the left forearm.

" I see, I see," said the doctor. " How old is she? "

" Seven, going on eight," answered Fati.

" Well, there you are. Her immunity has worn off. Twelve days ago where were you? " he queried.

Fati spoke quickly. " They had just come from Kashan."

" Yes, yes. The journey, of course," he muttered to himself. He asked Talaat, " Did you see any sick person on the way? "

Talaat's face blanched. " The beggar at Dehabad! She had sores too! "

" Where is the child's mother? " the doctor asked the major.

Ali lighted a cigarette and told him the events of the day. At length the doctor said: " You will have to get a nurse for this child; no *baji* will do for such a case. She will have to be isolated here, and no one must enter or leave this room. In the

morning I will vaccinate the servants and the other little girl. Your wife, of course, cannot return home if she wishes to be with her son in the hospital."

He and Ali went upstairs together after directions for Effat's immediate comfort were given. The doctor said to Ali: " I always said misfortune traveled with company! You are in for a third — watch out! Are there not always three of a kind? "

Ali laughed cynically. " I am not superstitious! " Nevertheless, he directed that the doctor's orders be carried out and a good practical nurse engaged for Effat.

Most of the time Parvin was left to wander about the garden, alone and neglected. Her father scarcely glanced at her and she grew so afraid during his brief visits to the *anderun* and his fits of temper at the servants, that she would hide trembling until his departure left peace in the garden once more.

Esmat, numbed by the ordeal of Ali Naqi's condition, was speechless when she heard of Effat's illness. The picture of the village teahouse, the beggar covered with sores, rose before her; she sank in a faint to the floor of the hospital room.

Naneh rushed excitedly into the corridor, loudly summoning help. Eventually the uniformed nurse in charge of the children's ward appeared with Shamsi. " What has happened? Is Ali — "

" No," cried Naneh. " His mother has fainted — help me! "

When consciousness returned, Esmat was dazed and unhappy. She turned to Shamsi, for she felt closer to this Persian woman than to the Armenian nurse. " God knows I have done nothing to merit this plague of misfortunes. Everyone blames me, but I have done nothing — nothing," she reiterated despairingly.

The nurse and Shamsi exchanged glances. " This is a case for you," said the hospital graduate. " Take her to my room and see what you can do for her."

Gently Shamsi helped Esmat to her feet and suggested that they have a cup of tea together. Naneh helped them depart and then turned to the nurse curiously. " What does Shamsi really do here in the hospital? "

" She's a sort of helper for the patients who are sad and

discouraged." The nurse was vague.

Naneh gave her a shrewd look and nodded wisely. " I see. She's a Moslem turned Christian trying to turn us all that way. I expect she gets paid for her converts, doesn't she? Well, she won't succeed with Esmat Khanum. Her father's a Mujtahid and her father-in-law's a Motavali! Let her cheer her up if she can; the poor child needs a woman friend in this city. But she'll never change her religion! "

By the end of the week it was evident that Effat's illness was not severe; the fever had abated and the festering sores did not increase. Esmat was anxious about the girl's face. " Is the nurse a good one? " she asked Naneh. " Does she know to cover Effat's hands so she cannot scratch the sores? "

" They are like cotton balls, ripened to pick! " Naneh replied. " God be praised, the face has only a few sores and the nurse punctures each before it bursts."

Esmat turned to her baby. " If only fate lets Ali Naqi get well, what will a few scars on Effat matter? "

Yet she fought against the baby's remaining in the hospital the specified time. The X-rays had shown a congenital dislocated hip, in one of its less extensive forms. Ali made it clear that the doctor's orders would be obeyed, and one year was the minimum of rest needed.

Esmat protested to the nurse. " It is against the will of God. If he made him that way, that is the way he must remain."

" It is not God's will to have little children suffer. By treating him now when he is so young, there is every chance of a cure," the nurse told her.

Although Esmat's friends reminded her of the marvelous cures that the Americans had performed, she saw with her own eyes many whose kismet was not so fortunate, who had turned their faces to Qibleh and had been borne away on a bier.

" They came too late," the hospital helpers told her when she inquired why they had not been healed.

Crowds thronged the hallways, and often the gates of the big garden were closed before they had been opened an hour, so great was the press of the sick awaiting the help of the Chris-

tians. Much as she hated to mingle with them, the foreigners and their queer ways became familiar to Esmat, and she was forced to admit again and again, " How very kind they are! "

As she came and went through the corridors, Esmat often noticed Shamsi reading to the crowd waiting to see the doctor. The people called her the " Blessed Woman " because she had read the teachings of Jesus called the Beatitudes so many times to them. But Esmat always hurried past her, lest she hear the Christian teachings.

" I will not listen," she said to Naneh. " Let their skill cure Ali Naqi if it can, since his father insists on this trial, but I will not listen to their teachings. Did not our holy Prophet say, ' Sit not with them who believe not '? "

But one day it happened that she entered the hospital just as the " Blessed Woman " was saying: " The wise man, Solomon, you honor too. He is one of the ancient kings of the Eastern world. Listen to what he says in our Book:

" Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands."

Esmat pulled her chuddar tighter about her ears as she hurried up the stairs, but the words she had heard echoed in her mind:

" Har zani hakim — *every wise woman* —
Har zani jahil — *each foolish woman* — "

As she entered the bedroom she said to Naneh: " Don't listen to that Shamsi downstairs. She is an infidel. They all are, these Christians here."

Naneh nodded sagely. " So the Prophet said. Yet they love children. See how happy he is today! "

Esmat removed her street chuddar and substituted the prayer veil she was accustomed to wear in her own home. She seated herself beside her small son and let the veil fall carelessly over her shoulders. It revealed her face, flabby and unhealthy-looking, framed by the lace headdress fastened tightly beneath her chin. She had aged as suddenly as if an evil spirit

had touched her too, she thought as she studied her face in the small mirror of her handbag. Was it indeed her fault, as her husband insisted, that all this evil had come on the family?

"No, it is fate," she said to herself. "It is not possible to escape one's fate."

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CHAPTER 10

AT TIMES LIFE IN IRAN RUNS LIKE A PLACID STREAM; THEN again it rushes like a mountain torrent carrying boulders far down into the sands of the desert. It seemed now as if the family from Kashan were being swept into a current of misfortune, for no sooner had Effat recovered from her illness than the compulsory unveiling of women caught them in its whirlpool.

One day as Esmat was preparing to step into an open carriage at the hospital, the driver spoke to her. "Excuse me, khanum, but I have been ordered not to permit any woman in a veil to ride in my carriage again."

"What!" cried Esmat. "Are carriages for foreigners only? Are you too one of that despised class, Moslem turned Christian?"

"By Hezrati Mohammed and the sacred imams," answered the driver, "by the hairs of the red beard of my father, I am a Moslem and never will be anything else."

"Then why may I not ride?"

He leaned over and whispered, "The order has come from His Imperial Majesty, the shah of Iran; what can I do?"

Esmat, in exasperation and unbelief, called him a son of a burnt father, and turned to another carriage just entering the garden. Its passengers were two Persian men, who, after paying the driver, started up the steps of the hospital. While the driver was busy pocketing his fare, Esmat stepped into the carriage, her veil held closely about her face. "Go to the *kucheh*, the lane near the Majlis, the Parliament," said she. "Hurry too; I am late as it is."

When the driver turned and discovered she was veiled, he informed her that he too was under strict orders not to carry

a veiled passenger ever again. Really angry now, Esmat ordered him to drive her to the police station, where, she declared, she would report him.

"Madam," said the driver, "I will lose my permit to drive if I take you one block."

"Go! Go! Boro!" commanded Esmat. "I tell you I am in a hurry. I will pay you double fare."

The driver threw up his hands in despair at the ignorance of women. His previous passengers were still standing on the steps, listening, and he called to them to assure the lady that he was speaking the truth. The two men could tell at a glance that the woman in the carriage was wealthy, for her eye screen was of the finest horsehair weaving; her veil was of heavy crepe de Chine, with intricate drawn work; her silk stockings shimmered through the drawn threads; her suede shoes were extravagantly high-heeled.

So they approached the carriage. "Khanum, where have you been that you had no news of this last night?" asked the older man.

"I — I — I have been in the hospital with my sick baby," replied Esmat, alarmed at their serious expressions. "Why, what can have happened?"

"Women must unveil," said the younger man.

"Surely you have heard the talk," said the elder.

"Talk! Talk! Of course people have talked; ever since the examinations and the defrocking of the mollahs and the seyids, there has been talk. How can they make a Moslem woman expose her face to the gaze of infidels?"

The men looked at each other in silence. The older one said, "I tell you the women will never allow this unveiling."

His companion answered with a shrug of his shoulders. "By Allah! How can they help it? It is the shah's orders!" He turned to Esmat again: "Your driver is correct, khanum. He cannot take you if he wishes to continue his present occupation."

Reluctantly, Esmat stepped down from the carriage. As luck would have it, an army officer, whom she knew to be her husband's friend, drove up in his car at that moment, and she ap-

proached him. " Aga, you are my husband's friend. I beg of you, send me home in your car. These carriage drivers — may the devil take them — will not carry a veiled passenger this day. My husband is Major Ali Kashani."

At the mention of his superior's name, the captain eagerly opened the door for her. " It is a great pleasure to serve my major in this small way," he declared.

A few minutes later Esmat entered her garden and told her tales to Talaat and to Fati, who had just returned from the bazaar with exciting reports of their own about the morning's events. However serious the ban on carriages for veiled women might be to others, it did not concern the Kashani family too seriously, for a car was at their disposal most of the day and they were inclined to treat the new decree as a joke.

The family's preoccupation with the baby was such that the next step in the unveiling passed by without their being aware of it. Besides, none of the family cared to ride in the public busses, which they considered too dirty and crowded for people of quality, or even for their servants. So they scarcely realized that women clothed in the chuddar of Islam were no longer permitted in busses.

The first three months of immobility for Ali Naqi came to an end. The doctors repeated their X-ray examination and reported that the hip was in good position in its socket, but that it would be absolutely necessary to continue the treatment as originally planned. When Esmat saw her son busy and happy even though bedfast, she found time to go shopping again at Lalehzar, the fashionable district. One day she ordered the car to stop in front of one of the finest luxury shops. She picked out her purchase and opened her purse to pay for it, but the clerk refused to sell to her, a woman in a veil. Indignantly she returned to the car and made the chauffeur complete the purchase for her.

As they drove on, she found herself looking about to see what other veiled women of her rank were doing. " Believe me," said she to Naneh afterward, " they did just as I did: sent their menfolk to finish the deal for them."

They both laughed at the absurdity of ordering women to

leave off the veil when they went shopping! Who would ever let a shopkeeper see her face? True, there were teachers who were forced to lay aside their veils at the Department of Education building, else they could not receive their salaries. Teachers, said the women, were a peculiar type of person anyway, not at all the class that Esmat and her friends belonged to. Yet a day came eventually when Esmat realized that nut shops, meat shops, and bread shops were actually closed to veiled women of all classes. She vowed she would never go shopping again. Let the men do the buying!

Ali Naqi had been in the hospital four months when one morning Esmat awoke to a consciousness of a familiar nausea. The memory of previous pregnancies filled her mind: the growing bulkiness of her body, the gratitude she had so often felt for the all-concealing chuddar of Islam. Suddenly she moaned as she realized her predicament. *What if the shah really does make all women unveil?* she thought. *What could I do now?* Firmly she resolved: *I will never leave our garden. I will never look like those foreign women.*

Whether it was the excitement of city life or nervousness at the uncertainty of what the future would bring to Ali Naqi, or the slowly dropping sword of Damocles threatening ultimate unveiling that caused her ill-health at this time, Esmat did not know or care. She only knew the odor of food was obnoxious, the taste of water was disgusting, the sight of her helpless son was terrible. All combined to make her cross and unhappy.

She said to Naneh: " What if this baby should be deformed! What a curse it is that we have to bear children! "

Naneh's eyes narrowed as she looked at her mistress. " Go to the bath," she ordered. " You will feel better afterward."

But when they entered the narrow street of the bath, they stared in astonishment at the crowd of women collected before the door. " What is it? " cried Naneh. " Has anything happened? "

Several women replied at once. " The bath man has orders to let no veiled woman enter the bath after today. So all the neighborhood wants to bathe."

Naneh elbowed her way through the group, who permitted

the two women to reach the door, for they could see by Esmat's veil that she was a woman of quality. Yet there they were compelled to wait for some minutes before they were given precedence over the excited, calico-veiled women.

Once inside, Esmat sat on her heels on her big, shallow bath tray while Naneh began soaping her long hair, still in its tiny plaits. The room buzzed with conversation. This was the most important step in the unveiling program of the shah. Could the bath man enforce it tomorrow? Suppose all those waiting women had not bathed, what then?

This time Esmat and Naneh were directly concerned. They listened to the women's shocked voices: " All the laws of Islam are built around cleanliness and uncleanliness. No woman can say her prayers while she is unclean. And we remain unclean until we have been to the bath."

One young mother cried out: " If the baby wets my body, I am unclean. If my husband comes near me, to the bath I must go! "

Naneh joined the conversation: " What will you do without your veil when you go on the street? Everyone will know you are pregnant."

The other replied: " Why should I care? There will be others like me! " She shrugged her naked shoulders and added: " Maybe they won't make us go unveiled in the streets yet. I'll wear my veil to the bath door and give it to the servant to hold until I come out again."

Another, a very chic young woman, spoke up: " If I get pregnant now, I'll have an abortion. I would not be seen in that condition without a veil."

Conversation lulled for an instant as the women considered this way of escape, then buzzed with tales of women who had had abortions performed, who had officiated, where they had stayed.

As she was being scrubbed, Esmat listened to their chatter. *But abortions are sins in Islam,* she thought. Fatima, her mother, had taught her this. Yet she made mental note of the name of the woman mentioned as the best specialist in that line of work.

Naneh noticed Esmat's interest. " What are they talking about? " she whispered.

" Be still! " her mistress ordered. " I want to hear." The conversation turned to accounts of successful abortions, what they had cost and how little pain they had caused.

While she lay resting on the brick platform of the outer room, sipping her tea, she said to Naneh, " Find out where that foreign midwife lives." The servant shook her head sadly when she guessed what was going on in Esmat's mind.

It was noon when the two women entered the *kucheh* in front of the bath and again saw the restless crowd. A seriousness now in the faces of the women indicated that the rumor about the closing of the baths to veiled women was no longer idle gossip.

The following day no veiled women were admitted. Whatever nebulous ideas of evading the law they had conceived amounted to little, for only a few did what they had declared they would do: step out of their street veils at the bath door and hand them to waiting servants. Nevertheless, the city was unprepared for the final order: that all soldiers forcibly uncover any veiled woman seen on the street. There were tales of torn veils, of angry women carried to the police station, of soldiers bitten and scratched.

Esmat had not stirred from the garden since the ban on veils in the streets. Naneh had taken Ali Naqi his special foods; the major had been out of town and there was no car. Most of the time she had sat moodily under the *cursie,* saying she did not feel well.

When Major Ali returned, he handed his wife a gold-inscribed invitation. She turned it over slowly, then began to read it. It was an invitation from the shah — the final step in the unveiling program.

" Of course I will not go," she said proudly. " I would not be seen in such a crowd without a veil."

He fingered his cigarette, slowly wiping off the ashes on a tray nearby. His eyes glowed angrily, while his mouth grew firm. Then he spoke, steadily and determinedly. " You will go," he ordered. " What is more, the shah will have his queen and

her daughters there unveiled, and you will be unveiled also. You will need a new dress, a long one, with long sleeves and high neck, as has been decreed."

Then he stepped back and stared at his wife as though seeing her for the first time. Her thin house veil revealed her braids of hair hanging down under the lace head *charqat*. Her front hair had been cut just below her ears to form a soft frame for her face. She had always worn it that way. The women of Kashan all wore it thus.

"Your hair is wrong. It will have to be cut," he ordered.

Esmat's hands flew to her head. "No! No!" she cried. "Only women who have been unfaithful to their husbands have short hair. I will never, never have mine cut."

Major Ali gave a short laugh. "There was a time when I too thought the loss of my beard a catastrophe."

"But you—" she stopped, shook her head emphatically. "I will not go to the reception. I will not be seen unveiled. I will not have my hair cut. I will die first."

"Then I will be relieved of my rank and made a common soldier," answered her husband. "For you are not dead, and the shah will find it out."

CHAPTER 11

THAT NIGHT ESMAT LAY AWAKE PLANNING A WAY OF ESCAPE. The bands of Islam, forged by her mother's fanaticism, seemed suddenly to have loosened and she found herself desperately unhappy. All her life had been centered around the commands of the Prophet, as iterated and reiterated by her mother. The months had been Moslem timetables dividing her seasons into necessary duties, said her mother: pilgrimages to the nearby shrines, mourning the untimely deaths of holy imams; attending passion plays, watching and grieving with the bleeding head cutters, their white capes blood-spattered, following the bloody, hoarse men parading the streets until they entered the Mosque and were relieved of their vows; observing the Month of Fasting!

She seemed to see herself, a little nine-year-old girl, wearing her new veil, trying to keep the fast, and she felt again the disgrace of the thirst that finally forced her to drink secretly before the sunset call to prayer had sounded. . . . She thought of her father, and the first suitor he had chosen for her, and the reason she had threatened to drown herself rather than be married to him. . . . Her first view of Seyid Ali — his green sash, his seyid's turban, his youthful beard of honor — answered all the desires in her young heart for a man of Islam, a husband of true religion. She recalled her bridal night, her fears lest he not find her pleasing. . . . How glad she had been when he had arisen at the muezzin's call to prayer, performed the Islamic rituals, and prayed as all Moslems should!

She tossed restlessly. Her pride in Ali's religious importance had been so short-lived. Less than two years a devotee of Islam, less than two years before the disgrace of his failure! She had sought to compensate by being even more strict in

the fulfillment of her own duties.

She whispered to herself: *I have been so particular — so exact. . . . I have never gone unveiled before men; I have never omitted the cleansing required of a wife and a mother; I have given to the poor. . . . I have done everything I should.* . . . She paused in her thoughts before a chasm of unknown terrors as the realization of her present predicament swept over her; she drew back in horror, refusing to admit the truth even to herself. Then her mind suddenly leaped over the deep channel of her fears. *Ali says I must do it. I must go with him to the reception. Ali says I must* — bayad bikoni!

Let the men see me! His officers, the minister of war, even the shah! I may not wear a veil — I may not stay at home in seclusion. It is a sin!

She was willing to suffer for her religion — but Ali was not! Perhaps . . . perhaps if he knew she was pregnant again he could be excused. . . . She looked at her sleeping husband and thought: *I could tell him now — only he would be angry if I woke him. . . . He said I must have a new dress . . . but he did not know I am pregnant! No dress can hide that for long — only a veil of Islam. I must wear my veil.*

Ai Khoda! *What can I do? What can I do now?*

She tossed uneasily. Pregnancy and immediate unveiling stood like specters beside her, forcing her into a strange road which pointed a way of escape to both simultaneously. *An abortion! That woman they talked about. They said she worked very quickly — a few hours only. Ali doesn't want another baby . . . it might be abnormal.*

Her conscience stirred. It would be a sin . . . *an abortion is a sin in Islam.*

She smothered its voice in her racing thoughts. *He says we have enough children . . . it might be abnormal . . . perhaps I would be sick; then I would not be able to go with Ali; I would not need to have my hair cut if I were seriously ill. . . . I will do it. . . . I* must *do it. But when? Not just yet . . . next week will be better.*

Her conscience gave a moan — or was it herself who had uttered the half moan, half sob? *It is a sin . . . a sin you will*

be doing! But it is a sin either way — a sin to be unveiled — a sin to abort. . . . Which is the lesser? Surely a wee baby that has not moved yet is no baby. It is nothing. . . . It has no soul until it breathes . . . all the women say that! It is so little too; it could not hurt much to come away.

Or, if it does hurt and I am really ill, I certainly could not attend the reception. . . . I would not need to unveil. . . . I would not need my hair cut. . . .

Around and around raced her whirling thoughts.

Ali stirred in his sleep and awoke. Dawn was flooding the sky and she had not slept. She watched her husband through half-opened eyes as he dressed. Now she could tell him that she was pregnant. But could she? Should she? She closed her eyes and lay quiet. *Perhaps if he knows my condition he will not make me go after all. It is his baby too. He ought to care . . . but he won't. He is so sure I am to blame for Ali Naqi. I couldn't stand it if he was cross. I would be certain to cry. . . . No, I won't tell him.*

So Esmat pretended sleep — planning her way of escape.

And Ali left her alone. There was no escape from his duties.

Throughout that day Esmat moved like one in a dream. Her nausea took a nervous turn and she was unable to stop it. Naneh was concerned, but Esmat pleaded weariness. " I could not sleep last night."

" It was that bath yesterday," her woman answered. " There was too much excitement. Let me steep you some oxtongue tea; probably you are coming down with influenza."

Esmat was too weary, too confused, to protest. She added: " Get me a fresh cucumber, Naneh, if you can find one. Or if you can't, give me a few whiffs of opium from the gardener's pipe. I don't want much — just enough to stop this nausea."

When Ali came home late that evening, she was asleep and he did not disturb her.

But if Esmat had sought to evade her problems by taking refuge in a subconscious neurosis, she failed. The following morning she was less nauseated, it was true, yet the thought of the reception, the need of immediate action lest Ali ask her plans, still haunted her.

Nor could she forget her mother. She seemed to hear her strict voice repeating her girlhood axioms: Keep your face covered before men. No real lady — no *dokhtarinajib* — permits a man, any man save her husband and relatives, ever to look at her face. When you are married, remember, it is your duty to bear sons for your husband. Abortion is a sin . . . abortion is a sin . . . keep your face covered . . .

Two sins — two forbidden ways — yet she must choose one. She must decide herself — which is the lesser.

That afternoon, Thursday, Ali was free and he remained at home until late afternoon when the car came to take him to the hospital. Esmat had not seen Ali Naqi for days, but she dared not walk in the streets for fear she would be insulted by some zealous policeman and Ali had not offered the car for her use.

" Let me go with you," she said.

Ali was not pleased. " You have not unveiled. They might trouble me."

" Not in an army car! Not a major's wife," Esmat cried. " They do not disturb private cars."

" Not yet — but who knows when they may be ordered to? " He walked on.

" Just this once — I beg of you, give me one visit this week to my baby! " Esmat looked at him so pleadingly that Ali relented. " Hurry, then. I am ready."

So Esmat went with her husband. But she regretted it before she came home, for Ali, disturbed by his son's immobility, again accused her of passing on her family defect to the boy.

Esmat could not answer him. As she looked at Ali Naqi she felt a new horror of her unborn child. Perhaps — surely it was true her uncle, her mother's brother, was crippled — it might be inherited. This new baby might be even more disfigured.

So keen was her fear, so anxious her thoughts, so urgent her need for decisive action that she quarreled and argued with her husband and ended up by weeping hysterically and being banished to the car while he visited his son undisturbed.

Esmat caught her breath in a sob as she walked down the corridor. Shamsi, who was standing nearby, asked her what

was the trouble.

Esmat hesitated. *She is unmarried,* she thought, *what does she know of men? How can she know my fear of giving birth to another crippled baby? She is unveiled among men and women in the hospital; it is impossible for her to know how I feel.*

So Esmat said: " It is nothing. I do not feel well. I will sit in the car where the air is fresher."

Nevertheless, as she sat there, she made her decision — she would have an abortion. She would send word with the gardener that she would come — just to visit her — But when? Tomorrow was Friday. Ali was home then, and certainly no midwife, foreign doctoress or not, would begin a new case on Friday. It was always bad luck. Very well, Saturday then! Saturday morning, two hours before noon, and she would surely be home before evening. Had not all the women agreed it took only a short time — and there was scarcely any pain?

The decision stopped her tears. She was composed and sedate when Ali joined her. He looked relieved when he saw she was not crying, and, sitting down beside her, said to the chauffeur, " Drive to Lalehzar, to the silk shop near the Palace Cinema." He turned to his wife: " Let us buy your material for the dress for the reception. The sooner we get it, the better; the dressmakers are all so busy."

Esmat caught her breath. " But we need the money for Ali Naqi — I don't need a new dress. I do not intend to go to the reception."

Ali said nothing until the car stopped at the shop. Then he stepped out, turned to her, and said crisply, " Do you want to help select it, or shall I get it alone? "

Esmat drew back in her corner. Dare she defy him again? " I am not going — I told you I would rather die than be unveiled among men — "

His eyes blazed as he entered the shop alone. A short time later he appeared with a parcel, which he laid on the seat between them. *She is just a child being stubborn,* he thought; *curiosity will make her open it.*

But Esmat had made her decision. She looked out of the win-

dow, disregarding his purchase.

Ali spoke to her as he let her get out of the car in front of their door. His tones were sharp and distinct: "I am sending the chauffeur to make an engagement with the dressmaker for Saturday morning at ten o'clock." Before she could answer, he drove away.

When she thought it over, she was glad of the excuse of the dressmaker. Naneh — whom she did not want to know her intentions lest she try to dissuade her — would not be surprised when the car called for her. And the chauffeur? She could tell him she preferred another dressmaker and would give him the doctoress's address instead. She would tell him to come for her — to wait for her at the head of the lane — as she would spend the rest of the day with friends who lived near there. At sunset, just at sunset, she would meet him there, for the lane was too narrow for cars to enter.

So Esmat acquiesced silently when her husband left her on Saturday and announced the car would call for her two hours before noon. Ali drove away with a feeling of relief that his wife had seen reason at last. His friends had told him of fanatical women who were violently opposing the shah's orders — he had feared that his wife might be like them. Esmat had apparently decided it was useless to resist fate. After all, it was fate that had brought her to Teheran at this time. Kismet, said Ali. Kismet!

Esmat was ready when the car returned. She said to Naneh: "If I don't get back early, don't be surprised. My father's cousin lives near the dressmaker's, and if I feel better I may spend the day with her."

"*Insha Allah* you will stay until evening! It will be good for you."

When the car brought Esmat to the entrance of a deserted little side street, she gave the chauffeur the directions she had planned and watched him drive away. Then she walked along the lane, keeping close to the garden wall. Now that she was so near, so irrevocably near to her purpose, doubts of the wisdom of her decision made her walk with short, hesitant steps, her black veil drawn tightly around her. Her throat was dry, she

felt her heart pounding, she heard the rushing of her blood in her ears. Above her was the cloudless sky of a perfect Teheran day.

Was this the door? She studied the name on the brass plate; she looked about — a stream trickled down the center of the road, under the large stone at her feet into the garden she would enter. She looked up — tall, tangled trees lifted their crowns over the wall. A crow cawed — was this a sign of evil portending? She shuddered — then lifted the knocker and started at its loud fall. A panic of fear — a desire to flee — swept over her.

It was too late. Inside, the sound of her knocking had awakened the watchdog; he barked with a high, excited bark; she heard shuffling steps approaching the gate. The door opened; an unkempt, slovenly servant assured her that the doctoress, as all her patients called the foreign midwife, was at home.

Esmat entered. The house, a large, rambling building, stood far back among dark pine trees; the garden was neglected. The dog yapped at her feet. Overhead a second crow rose cawing; they circled about and settled again, gray and black shadows, half hidden in the midst of the pine boughs, scolding and cawing raucously, quarreling evilly together over a kitten caught in the branch of the tree. *A bad omen,* thought Esmat. She stared in dismay as one crow flew at the kitten. *Poor little thing! They will kill it!* She gasped as the second crow drove his sharp beak in one eye. Horrified, she was unable to move until the servant called to her and led her into a room stuffy with many dusty but valuable carpets. Large oil paintings hung on the walls, stern faces of men and women. Even they looked sinister to Esmat. The servant left her a moment; then a door opened and the doctoress entered. She was a short, frowsy woman, with very light hair which stood out around her head. Esmat was fascinated by the woman's hands, which seemed to her very ugly — knotty veins standing out, huge knuckles, and fingers loaded with rings — *evil hands,* thought Esmat. With halting words she explained the reason for her visit. The doctoress gave a falsely reassuring smile, coolly named her price, and told her that she expected payment in

cash in advance. Esmat was prepared for this and the woman took the money and stuffed it into a half-opened drawer. Then she led Esmat into a room smelling of antiseptics, where strange, glittering instruments were piled in glass cupboards.

A rawboned elderly woman helped Esmat undress and climb upon an oilcloth-covered table and then covered her with a sheet. Esmat heard the doctoress washing her hands, giving short orders to the other woman in her fluent but strangely accented Persian. She lay still, bracing herself for what was to come. As she heard the doctoress come near, noisily dropping several instruments into a pan beside the table, she closed her eyes and so did not see the hypodermic needle as it was handed to the doctoress. She dug her nails deep into her palms as she felt the sudden, unexpected jab in her arm.

What has she given me? What is she doing with those instruments? Why are they pushing and pulling me about so much?

Then, then it came — a tugging, gnawing, pulling pain that felt as if all her insides were being torn out.

She wanted to scream — but only a subdued moan came from her lips.

What was that? Was she bleeding to death? Like Ali's mother? Was her lifeblood running away from her?

From far away, through the roaring black waves that engulfed her and blacked out her consciousness, she heard the excited voice of the doctoress, the running feet of her helper, then all was darkness.

When Esmat came to again, she lay on a couch in another room. The doctoress's helper stood by with a glass of hot tea, steadying her head and urging her to drink it. But she had taken only one sip before the black waves wrapped around her once more. She did not remember how many times they had tried to awaken her — she only realized how impossible it was to hold her head up for even a minute — without sinking again into welcome forgetfulness.

But now they had told her it was evening; the sun would soon set and she must meet her chauffeur. The two women helped her rise to her feet. Esmat felt terribly weak; she swayed as she walked. But the firm arms of the women sup-

ported her, pulled and shoved her to the door, obviously anxious that she should be gone.

Esmat took a few steps, paused, started again, and at length reached the door. Out in the air she felt better. There was the shrill little dog yapping furiously at her again. Above, the sky was the turquoise blue of a March evening, and the crows were circling and wheeling, cawing with harsh voices as they prepared to roost for the night in the dark branches overhead. Evil birds, preying on a helpless kitten — evil birds of ill omen that she was never to see again without a shudder of horror.

She drew back at the garden door and asked the doctoress and her woman: " Could you tell the sex of the baby? Or was it too little? "

The reply made her moan. " A boy! " she whispered in anguish. She stumbled out of the doorway into the lane, conscious that the servant went with her to the head of the lane where the chauffeur was waiting. She spoke to the man: " I have been sick — take me home quickly."

Sobbing, she hid herself within the welcome depths of the car and scarcely knew when it reached her own door.

" You need not wait," she said, dismissing him. When he had driven away, she walked slowly to the servants' door.

She knocked twice, called softly: " Naneh! Open to me! Dear Naneh, be quick."

When Naneh opened the door, she found her mistress lying unconscious beside it. She called the others and together they succeeded in getting Esmat into bed. The nearby doctor was called and injections were given before she awoke to consciousness.

She heard her husband's voice, as if he were far away. " Are you certain it was an abortion? "

A male voice replied, " It could not be anything else."

Slowly Esmat opened her eyes to see Ali looking into her face. When he saw she was conscious he spoke to her: " You might kill yourself, if you wanted to. You have no right to kill my children! "

He turned away and left the room with the doctor.

CHAPTER 12

WHEN ESMAT DID NOT ACCOMPANY HER HUSBAND TO THE RE-ception, detectives lost no time in verifying her illness. But her foolish deed had laid her low in fact, and the doctor sent under the shah's direction could find no pretense in the Kashani home. Unlike many who had dared to practice subterfuges to escape bringing their unveiled wives and had been discovered, Ali, who had feared demotion, rose in favor with His Majesty who showed his approval by promoting him. Pride in his new work and a firm resolve not to be found lax in his duties made Colonel Ali cruelly stern with his junior officers. He brought the same severity into his home, and the *anderun* was a place he rarely visited after he learned the true reason for Esmat's illness. When he had time, he visited his son in the Christian hospital, but that was seldom.

Naneh and Fati brought home tales concerning men who had sought relief from their obligations. One of the high cabinet officials had petitioned for a private interview with His Majesty and told the shah of the multitudinous virtues of his wife, adding that one who saw her would never know her good heart because of her ugly face. He sought permission for her to remain at home, a most special request under most special conditions. The shah was adamant.

The women of the highest class had been compelled to accompany their husbands in the dress ordered by Riza Shah Pahlavi, without veils to hide defects or beauty, into the presence of their ruler, his chosen queen, and her two daughters. Then, like a wave whose crest was the shah's reception, the Municipality, the Government Bank, the Department of Education, the merchant class, all entertained their employees with their wives at a series of receptions that swept all Iran.

Through it all Esmat lay too ill to be interested. She grew weaker and wept helplessly, moaning for her mother to comfort her and seeking refuge in memories of her childhood when she had been surrounded by love.

At first Naneh wept with her, but at length she and Fati sent messages to the *birooni* that Esmat had no desire to live and might actually die if something were not done to help her. The two women urged the nazir who bore their message to Colonel Ali to suggest that he send for her parents.

At first her husband angrily refused to consider the suggestion, but he did consult the doctor, who assured him that Esmat's condition was still grave, though he saw no physical reason for it. It might be a good plan if her mother could be with her for a while; after all Esmat had done no more than hundreds of other women in Iran and her husband should not let her die if he could help it. Ali was annoyed, but he sent a telegram to her father and ordered arrangements made for his parents-in-law to visit Esmat.

When the automobile stopped before the garden door, Fatima proudly drew her veil tightly about her face before she descended. Although they had seen many women without veils in the city streets, she seemed not to have realized that the unveiling was general until an uncovered woman walked past their automobile. " In God's name," she cried to her husband, " have they no shame, to be seen thus in public? "

The Mujtahid muttered something into his red beard about " imitators of the families of the collared folk," and adjusted his camel's-hair robe and his large turban before knocking loudly at the door.

Naneh opened it, gave a scream of delight, and flung her arms about her former mistress. " Thank God you have come! Now Esmat Khanum will get well! "

Fatima's first question was: " What made her so sick? Was it the water and air of Teheran? or worry over her son? "

" No," lied Naneh glibly. " She has had chills and fevers like malaria. The doctor gave her something to stop them; the medicine made her miscarry."

Fatima was a keen observer. She also knew Naneh well; she

knew she would lie to save Esmat from punishment; she had done it many times before. So she said no more just then, but one day when Esmat was better and Fatima was alone with her, she took her to task. " Abortion is a sin; I have told you many times. Did you try to prevent that miscarriage? Did you call the doctor at once? "

Esmat shrank back in her pillows, her face blanched as if her mother had struck her. Her stammering denial told her mother what she needed to know to give her a tongue-lashing Esmat could never forget. She lay speechless, incapable of giving her reasons, not daring to deny her guilt, knowing her fanatical mother would not understand.

Fatima ended by warning her: " Islam will not forgive this sin, even if your husband does. You will suffer — you will suffer for it! "

Esmat wept until her father, filled with consternation at the depth of her woe, sat quietly by her side, pouring out his heart's devotion until it acted as balm on her wounded spirit. He told her tales of her sister Soroor — how happy she and her bridegroom were in their new home; how many new roses were blossoming for the perfume for which Kashan was famous; how Mansur Gulab, the new husband, had told everyone that he always intended to live and make attar of roses in Kashan. Esmat forgot her troubles as she listened eagerly to her father's pictures of the happy home in Kashan.

The Mujtahid and his wife, unconcerned about the new styles in the city, rode in their son-in-l..'s military automobile, paying no attention to the remarks of passers-by. The military license protected them from insults by the police. This was their first visit to Teheran, and the lovely spring days usually saw them out driving with their grandchildren. They contacted former friends, one a distinguished teacher of Persian literature in the University of Iran. He had a family of small children and the little ones played happily together.

The Mujtahid had brought a gift for his literary friend: a cage with a yellow canary in it. The duplicate had been given to Esmat. The two men agreed that they should have a picnic at Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim, where the spring was, to test the

vocal abilities of their birds. Their women and children could come along if they would promise not to disturb the men.

The following Friday they drove to the city of the Shrine south of the capital and left their cars, with the chauffeurs, safely parked on the graveled road while the women and children walked slowly around and across the numerous watercourses to the Spring of Ali a half mile distant. It was still early in the morning when they reached the bubbling mountain spring. The menservants spread the rugs on the grass, far from the laughing women and children who wandered up the hill to watch the washing of rugs in the soft waters of the spring.

The two men sat on the rugs, facing each other, and slowly uncovered their canaries. Neither spoke while the birds hopped about studying their new environment. Then suddenly the canary given to the teacher burst into song. Esmat's bird followed with a trill of joy. All through the long spring morning the little birds sang, while the men quietly sat smoking their water pipes, absorbed in the beauty of sounds, the beauty of spring, the beauty of peace in their world. At length the songs ceased and the birds were rewarded with bits of grass and food from the lunch basket. There was no question, however, but that the teacher's bird was the finer songster. Which was quite fitting, for does not one give one's friend the best when one gives a gift in Iran?

That day Esmat's youth and good constitution had conquered and she was able to walk about the house for the first time. In her wanderings she entered the room the Christian nurse had occupied while Esmat was delirious. Pulling aside the hangings across an alcove in the wall, to see whether it had been cleaned, she discovered a book. She was so tired of her own thoughts that any book drew her as a magnet. It was a Bible, left by the nurse. It opened in Esmat's hands at the proverbs of Solomon. As she read the title, she recalled the words of the woman in the hospital: " The wise man, Solomon, you honor too. . . . 'Wise woman — *zani hakim* . . . foolish one — *zani jahil.*' "

Esmat sat down on the edge of the iron bed determined to find the verse. A half hour later the words stared at her:

"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands."

Gradually their meaning struck her. She whispered to herself: " Mother says everyone who commits a sin is punished; perhaps my sickness was punishment enough so that God will forgive me . . . But, mother says there will be — there surely will be punishment."

The sound of her husband's voice in the garden stirred her from her pain-filled reverie. She placed the book back where she had found it and walked slowly into the courtyard where she discovered Colonel Ali with the gardener. He looked at Esmat closely as she came down the steps, then gave her a polite salutation and asked after her health.

" I am better," she said. " Is it time for those flowers already? It seems early, doesn't it? "

The gardener saw fit to answer. " No, khanum, the end of Farvardin is the time it is always done."

Colonel Ali turned to him. " Did you bring the nasturtiums I ordered? "

" They are in the box near the gate. Where shall I plant them? "

Esmat spoke up quickly: " They need lots of sun; put them here in front of the porch."

The gardener turned to his master for confirmation of the order. Apparently Ali did not agree with his wife. He pointed to a border near the door. " Yellow flowers look best when one enters. That border will have only yellow in it — stock, calendulas, nasturtiums." His voice was firm as he countermanded his wife's order.

The gardener touched his eye respectfully, said: " By my eye! I will do it. Whatever you order shall be done."

Esmat dared not dispute him. Let Ali order as he wished; she would do nothing to disturb him. Instead, she sat down quietly on a bench. She wanted to talk to her husband, but

what could she say? *I might ask him about Ali Naqi,* she thought, *but if he is not well, it will irritate him to be reminded of his lameness.* Finally she said: " My parents were pleased to go on this picnic. Mother had wanted to go to Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim again, for her prayers."

" Why did you not go with them? The weather is perfect."

" I did not feel strong enough — I did not want to — " She could not tell him her real reason; she would not say, " I am afraid of being insulted."

Knowing the servants were listening, her husband continued politely, " It would have been good for you; the air is perfect, springtime has come."

The gardener and his assistant had moved away. Ali came near the bench and said in a low tone, " When are they leaving? "

Esmat hesitated. " Soon, they tell me. Why do you ask? "

" The car they are using is mine only by courtesy. If veiled women ride in it much longer, it may be taken from me."

There it is again, Esmat thought. Could she, dare she, ask him about what the women were doing? " Is everyone, every woman unveiled now? "

There was no hesitation in her husband's reply. " Absolutely everyone! "

" But mother has not! She says she will scratch the eyes out of any man who dares touch her! "

" She is a fantical woman, old-fashioned and stubborn. She will have to leave this week or I will be the one she will make blind! "

Esmat said nothing. Ali moved nearer, lighted a fresh cigarette, and began again: " If you do not do as the other women, you will have to take the girls and return to Kashan with your parents. I have had enough of this disobedience."

Esmat gasped: " But Ali Naqi! He cannot go — "

" No, he certainly cannot. I shall keep him with me. I said you and the girls would have to return. Ali Naqi is hospitalized for another six months, the doctor says."

" But Naneh says there are many women who have not unveiled; my mother says she never will — " Esmat knew her

excuse was a lame one when she heard Ali's tone of disgust: " Your fanatical mother! Your woman! Are they the ones you follow? "

Esmat did not answer. *Was I a sinner for nothing?* she thought. *Must I unveil after all that pain and punishment? He is still angry — will he never forget it?* At last she could no longer bear to sit there watching him, feeling him condemn her, and she rose from her seat to re-enter the house.

That evening, plans were discussed for her parents' return to Kashan. Esmat tried to detain them, pleading that she still needed them; she sought to discuss with her father the corruption of their religion because of the dogmatic orders of the shah. " Perhaps you could get a group of clerics together and present a petition to His Majesty for a relaxing of the present laws."

Her father shook his head. " Such fervor as the shah shows in this new program is a fire which would burn me if I were to attempt to extinguish it."

" Will you do nothing, nothing? Will you leave me alone here to be tried and troubled and with no one to help me? "

The Mujtahid looked at her meditatively. " You have your husband, your children. Tomorrow I am going to Veramin again. I have decided to purchase a village near there. You can administer it for me."

Esmat was astonished. " I? What do I know about village and farm life? "

" You will learn," said her father. " It will be exactly what you need to keep you out of doors this summer."

He began to give her instructions in the responsibilities of ownership. She listened halfheartedly, and excused herself after a few minutes when she thought she heard the *birooni* door slam shut. Maybe her husband had returned to the *anderun!* But it was not her lover who brushed past her to enter the room where his father-in-law was seated. It was the stern colonel, who had business of his own to discuss and had no interest in women or their affairs.

He even omitted the customary polite salutations to his father-in-law, though he bowed low as he said: " Did I hear

you say you planned to leave on Saturday? You will pardon my asking — I do not wish to hurry you — but the shah has ordered me to inspect the new barracks in Qum on Sunday. It would be convenient if we went together, for after your return last evening I put my car in the military garage for repairs. It will be sent after me, but I cannot delay this inspection until it is ready."

The Mujtahid said he was pleased to help his son-in-law.

Esmat watched the preparation for departure, longing to go with them, to go anywhere away from this garden where misfortune had hit her such blows. But only for a few days — not forever! Surely Ali would forget what she had done — forget and love her again someday.

The excitement of the last week of her father's visit died down with the departure of the older couple and Ali. Several days of rainy weather followed and Esmat moped about the house, seeking escape from her thoughts in conversation with the servants. She found fault with their methods of cleaning; she troubled the menservants continually by interrupting their work in the garden, suggesting new improvements, and was angry when they refused to follow out her orders without first consulting her husband. Then Ali returned, but she seldom saw him and the days dragged by interminably.

At last word came that Ali Naqi was to be X-rayed again. Esmat, remembering that she had gone with her husband the first time, now really desired to leave the confines of her home and visit the hospital. Yet Ali would not take her, veiled as she was. What must she do now? She could not remain a prisoner in Teheran! She was too young, and the children needed her.

After the others had gone, she called Fati to her room. " My hair is falling out. It would be well to cut it. Can you get a barber to come here to the house? "

" Certainly, money will bring anyone to our garden," declared the woman, experienced in the ways of the capital.

" Well, get one," said Esmat shortly.

When the others returned from the hospital, it was noon. Naneh was volubly extolling the goodness of Allah as she came into the garden where Esmat was sitting.

" Is he cured? " cried Esmat.

" If it be God's will, he is cured. If it is his kismet to be lame, he is lame. It may be he is cured — the doctors do not know yet."

" Can they not tell yet? Tell me — tell me, don't talk to me about kismet! "

Naneh ceased her cryptic remarks. " Praise God for one blessing! His legs are the same length now! "

Esmat let her house veil fall to her shoulders as she raised her arms in a gesture of thanksgiving: *" Alhambdo l'Illah!* Praise God! Praise God! " she cried with joy.

" You have had your hair cut! " said Naneh staring in surprise. " How pretty you look! Only so thin, so very thin and pale! " She put her arms around her mistress. " You will see how well he looks; Ali Naqi will love you this way. You must go to him soon."

At the thought of this pleasure, Esmat was quieted.

CHAPTER 13

THE MUJTAHID AND HIS WIFE HAD BEEN GONE FOR TWO WEEKS. As the days dragged by and her husband did not reappear in her apartments, Esmat became more and more restless. She longed to visit her son, but still she could not bring herself to go out without a veil, to be stared at by strangers. Her short hair seemed to increase rather than allay her self-consciousness. Each day she sat idly listening to servants' chatter, to children's play and their quarrels.

Finally, nature forced her out of her seclusion, for in May, the month of Ordibihesht, an eclipse of the moon occurred — a fearful thing to the uneducated in Iran. Calls to prayer arose all over the city, and the servant class crowded the roofs to ward off the evil spirits that must accompany such an evil omen. The noise of drums and beaten pans and the shouts of men and women filled the night.

Naneh, Hussein the gardener, Talaat, and Fati formed a nucleus of superstitious folk that gradually drew the terrified little girls into its center and left Esmat, skeptical and isolated, watching the group. As the shadow crept over the face of the full moon and slowly passed away, their fears receded also. It was past midnight before they were quieted and sleep claimed the excited children — after all of them, even Esmat, had joined in prayers for protection from the Evil One.

The incident might have been forgotten save by the more superstitious women had not another occurred, of even greater portent, in the month of Khordad. A week after the eclipse, at six in the evening, Esmat was standing in her room, adding a touch of mascara to her brows. First she stared in amazement as the mirror began to move from side to side; then she dropped the brush and ran to the porch crying: " Earthquake!

Earthquake! " Servants and children took up the cry.

But there was only one severe tremor that night, and soon the family were joking and laughing about it.

That evening's quake was only a forecast of events of the coming week. So often and so violent were the quakes that all who had small houses or high walls adjoining their buildings fled into the wider avenues for safety. Forgotten were the restrictions the veil had implanted in the minds of the few secluded women. They too fled to fancied safety in the wide avenue in front of the Majlis, the Parliament.

Fear swept away Esmat's last barriers. She too, bareheaded and clad only in a thin summer dress, had been drawn into the vortex of humanity fleeing from unseen dangers. They spent the night in their island of safety, but Ali had not joined them. The gardener said he was out of town.

When the sun rose, the crowd dispersed, hurrying home after the restless night, scarcely noticing one another. That same day Esmat went out voluntarily. She put on the simple black hat that Naneh had purchased for her after her hair had been cut, then stared at her hands unbelievingly.

" What ugly things! " she exclaimed. " My veil always hid them so completely that I never really noticed them."

" Buy some gloves," suggested her woman. " As for me, my hands don't bother me, but my mouth is so immodest that I want to cover it thus — " She put up her hand in the familiar gesture that had always included covering her mouth with the veil.

Once the plunge had been made into the cold waters of curious stares, Esmat visited the hospital daily again. Her husband had not returned, so she went in a carriage, with the top raised so that she felt less conspicuous. Ali Naqi had improved greatly. Was it possible that the foreigners had cured her son? If they had, the gossip that they were demons come to destroy Islam could not be true.

One day she said to Naneh: " Is it possible for a Moslem not to dislike a Christian? or for a Christian to like a Mohammedan? "

The reply, spoken slowly, with shaking head, showed how

far Naneh too had gone along the road of toleration. " These Christians love to help so much they have no room in their hearts for dislike."

" You are right, and if they have cured Ali Naqi I cannot help liking them either." She little realized how far she also had departed from the fanaticism of a year ago. She only knew that " the American doctor's eyes are clean; he does not see evil."

One day the colonel came to the hospital when she was there, but he had eyes only for his son. Although he said little, the largess he scattered indicated his approval of Ali Naqi's improvement.

Esmat sought to detain him, to engage him in conversation. Restless, he strode from her presence. Night fell, but he did not return to his home. " Where does he go; with whom does he stay? " she asked herself.

She lied to her women: " The colonel says the children disturb him; he cannot sleep."

" When the moon is full, he will return," said Naneh comfortingly.

Esmat watched the slender thread of the new moon over the garden wall that evening. " When the moon is full," she whispered to herself. But her heart refused to add the words she had overheard Fati whispering to Naneh that morning: " Unless there is another woman, somewhere."

The night of the full moon came, but the colonel did not appear in the *anderun*. Esmat lay listening to footsteps approach her door and pass on, to the automobile horns in the Parliament Square, wondering which was Ali's. Why did he not come to see them? to see her? A sudden fit of nervousness made her tremble all over. *I have cut my hair too late,* she thought. *He will not have me any more. He hates me. He thinks I am to blame for Ali Naqi's condition, for Effat's smallpox. And he knew — and he knew — Why did I go to that midwife? I killed his second son myself.*

Her unborn baby, tiny hands still, unopened eyes, motionless form, haunted her dreams; her sin filled her waking hours as a worm fills its cocoon.

Ever echoing in the depths of her mind came the words she had sought to escape: "The foolish plucketh it down." Again and again she said to herself: "I am the real fool! Why, oh why, did I do that?"

It was late in the month of Khordad, June, when a letter arrived from the Mujtahid. He and his wife had reached Kashan safely, but he now recalled many details of his village that he had forgotten to mention to Esmat. He listed them. Esmat read the list with dismay. Apparently her father had meant what he said — she was actually to be the overseer of his newly acquired properties. She had listened halfheartedly when he told her about his plans. And she had not been to see them once since he left. All this detail was a man's task, surely. Why had not her father asked his son-in-law instead of his daughter?

But instinct told her that Colonel Ali would not be interested in such affairs. Ali had made village trips with his father and father-in-law, but he had always gone with reluctance and been glad to return to his luxurious home. He told her once of the sordid lives of the villagers, but without sympathy for them; rather with disgust that men were willing to live so animal-like. Yet time and again Esmat had overheard him taking the accounts of Ahmad the nazir for the Motavali, who had painstakingly checked them again with his son. Her husband knew well what must be done and when to do it.

But Ali never came to see her any more!

Ahmad knew — he could advise her! But Ahmad was in the village south of Kashan at this season, for it was the time for the wheat harvest.

So Esmat sat down to write to her father. She began with the usual polite salutations; then she stopped, twisted her pen a moment or two, and finally laid it down. How could she tell her father that she could not do this work? At length she closed the writing case, and said to herself: "I will go to his village tomorrow. Tomorrow evening I will finish my letter."

Rising at early dawn for the first time since she had been in Teheran, she sent her woman to the men's quarters to ask the use of the colonel's car for the day. Naneh returned with the

word that the colonel had not been in his room for many nights. No one knew where the car was. " Wait and go another day," Naneh advised.

But Esmat, having determined her course, would brook no delay. " Get me a taxi," she ordered. " Be sure to arrange for the entire day."

The gardener, a middle-aged trusted servant from Kashan and the only male employee on the place when the colonel was away, was sent to the square near the garages. It was nine before the car was at the gate.

Naneh inspected the chauffeur. " Khanum, you can't go alone with that young man. Take me with you. And Hussein too, if you really must go."

Esmat gave the chauffeur one glance through the garden door and took her woman's advice.

Naneh clutched at her unfamiliar hat with one hand and the side of the car with the other as they drove past the ancient tiled gate to Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim, past the Moslem cemetery, past the Mosque with its golden dome, out of the city and through the barren countryside until they had passed the ruins of the ancient Christian church; then on again into the village of Veramin, and up into the hills where the Mujtahid's new village nestled on the sunny slopes of the Elburz mountains.

All day Esmat tramped about the fields, followed by a wondering gardener and a devoted, but weary, woman servant. The villagers stared openmouthed at this woman from the city. The lack of a veil meant nothing to them, for they had never been veiled themselves; but short hair, neat, close-fitting clothes instead of the full skirts and trousered legs of the village women — these were too modern to fit into the scene they were accustomed to.

To the men it meant but one thing: Some of them tried to approach Esmat alone, but she made it clear that as the daughter of the owner of their property she was entitled to honor and respect.

When at last they gathered about her at the car, as she was preparing to leave, they listened in wonder to her crisp orders.

" You will have the opium harvested and ready for me when I come next week to collect it," she said as she stepped into the car.

Naneh seated herself by Esmat's side. " May Satan's ears be deaf! You were a very clever woman today! " She stared in surprise and admiration at her young mistress. " Who taught you all this? "

Esmat was weary, but she was also very pleased at her woman's compliments. She settled back in the seat of the taxi. " My father, the honored one, taught me my lessons in village care. I shall write him tonight and give a report." She spoke proudly, forgetting how reluctant she had been to undertake this task.

" *Falgir!* Fortuneteller! *Falgir!* " sang a masculine voice on the other side of the garden wall.

" Call him, Fati, quick! " ordered Naneh.

The little girls, playing on the steps, ran gleefully to the door after Fati, and all three called into the lane: " *Falgir!* Fortuneteller! Come to our house! "

The soothsayer had passed their door, but he turned back gladly and came into the garden. His sharp eyes took in at a glance the wealthy home, the expensively dressed children, the eagerness of the women servants and gardener to hear what he had to say. Curling his drooping mustaches, he smiled at the children, who hid shyly behind Naneh as she held out her hand to the *falgir.*

He did not touch her palm, but he made strange sounds with his lips as he studied its lines, " What a life! " he murmured. " One husband only and he is gone! "

" He is dead! " cried Effat, coming out from her shelter.

The *falgir* looked sharply at her. " Didn't I say he had gone away? Kerbela or An Najaf, Behesht, or Jahannum — paradise or hell — he's not here any more, is he? "

" You're right about that," agreed Naneh. " Tell me more! "

" I am very thirsty," hinted the soothsayer. " I have not had a drink since dawn! "

Talaat was sent for a glass of tea, which the man sipped

slowly, eying the servants speculatively. " Where is your mother? " he asked of Effat. " Why don't you call her? "

" Mother! Mother! Come out on the porch! The *falgir* is going to tell Naneh everything she ever did! " Effat and Parvin danced about with excitement.

Esmat came out and seated herself near the pallet where Ali Naqi lay. " Come nearer," she said. " I want to hear your fairy tales! " She wrapped her silken veil, which she still wore within the confines of the home, closely about her slender body and watched the scene with amusement.

Having assembled the audience he desired, the fortuneteller set aside his tea glass and proceeded with Naneh's fortune. His tale, with Naneh as the heroine, made the women shriek with laughter: One day she would go to Mecca and find the doorkeeper of the Shrine, a middle-aged man with one eye, eager to marry her; with him she would go to China, to Africa, to the islands on the other side of the world, before she finally returned to these beloved children in Iran.

The two little girls were entranced. After the laughter had died down, Naneh gave him two rials and would have dismissed him, but Effat begged to know her future and put out her little hand.

The *falgir* shook his head. " You are too young to understand my words of wisdom. Now if your mother, the khanum — "

Esmat had grown weary with her thoughts that morning; the past with its sins, the present without her husband worried her. " Tell mine, then," she said eagerly.

The man looked at her palm quickly and raised his eyes to the group in astonishment. " What riches! What luck you have had! But wait — it is not all good fortune! I see another person, a woman, an enemy; beautiful, but wicked like snake's poison, in your home. *Ya Khoda!* Bad fortune has begun for you. For seven years to come there is only bad luck in your hand! "

Fati and Naneh cried out excitedly: " It has begun already! He speaks truly! "

Esmat haughtily withdrew her hand. " I did not expect you

to predict misfortunes! "

The soothsayer appealed to the women. " Let me finish — it is a most interesting palm." He fingered his mustaches, twisting the ends into long curls. " It is not all bad luck I saw there! "

Naneh sided with him. " You were too quick, my lady. Such men often help one keep out of bad luck. Let him tell you more — "

Urged on by her women and the children, Esmat again held out her hand. The *falgir* had been studying the group, especially the little boy in the cast who had been allowed at home for a few days. Wary lest his bait slip from the trap, he cautiously prophesied that Ali Naqi would be cured of his lameness and foretold great fame for him. He prophesied that the two little girls would become beauties for whom men would quarrel one day.

Then suddenly he sprung his trap. " But you, you will be most unhappy, because your husband will take another wife."

Esmat struggled to escape this prediction. " You are not reading that in my palm," she said quickly closing her fingers.

" No, I read it in your stars. There is such misfortune in your hand and in your life to come that if you do not let me save you from it, you will never know another day of joy." The man spoke with conviction while he gazed, unblinking, into the sunny heavens.

" Save her if it is in your power! " cried Naneh and Fati simultaneously. " But what can you do? " asked the practical Fati.

" For only a small sum, fifty rials, I can write you prayers and charms that will avert your evil luck."

Esmat had turned away from the *falgir,* but now she faced him again. " Give it to him, Naneh," she ordered. " The prayers of fortunetellers and astrologers in Iran are famous for their efficacy."

Money, reed pen and ink, paper, and sealing wax were placed before the soothsayer, who settled himself on the step, and, holding the paper on one knee, wrote in beautiful curly Persian script several short prayers, which were sealed

and put in the tiny silver prayer case that Naneh produced from among her mistress's treasures.

At length he picked up the fifty-rial note, folded it into a small purse, and tucked it into his inner coat pocket. He gave them multitudinous blessings as he bid them farewell. The servants and the children watched him as he went down the *kucheh,* but Esmat sighed and went into the house.

" He is right, he is right," she whispered to herself. " I know there is misfortune in my stars. Another wife? And what was that about poison? " she stared at her palm.

The word " poison " was a thorn that pierced her mind and tore suspicion bleeding from her. She began to distrust her servants; she watched all the foods that came to her table, and, whenever they looked peculiar to her suddenly sharp eyes, summoned the cook and made her eat some in her presence.

Day after day passed, and the only interest she took in the outside world was in the arrival of the carriage she ordered daily for her drive with the children. She and Naneh and the little ones crowded into it and were often gone for hours at a time. With the absence of her husband, the car was gone also; taxis in the city did not appeal to her at all.

Esmat permitted the women and children to go out for walks after tea, but she rarely accompanied them. One day Fati, Talaat, Effat, and Parvin went up the avenue to look at the new monument being built in the square. That particular day a crowd had gathered to watch the shah returning from the Parliament, and they stood near the curb to watch the procession.

Motorcycles preceded the royal car; the horse guards followed; and trailing along behind were the automobiles of the ministers of the court and ranking officers. At length came the cars with diplomats, the junior officers of the army, the personnel in attendance at an opening of the Majlis. Among them little sharp-eyed Effat saw her father. " Look! There is my father! " she cried.

" Where? Where? Oh, I see him," cried Parvin. " I want to ride with him! "

" He's got company — you can't," said her elder sister.

" Who is it, Talaat? "

Talaat was excited too. " Look, Fati! A young, pretty lady! Do you know her? "

Fati shook her head. She had not located the car until it was nearly past them and had only caught a glimpse of the guest seated beside the colonel.

An hour later the children rushed excitedly to their mother. " We saw our father! " they cried. " And he had a lady with him, such a pretty lady! "

From that day Esmat was convinced that her husband had established a second home in Teheran. That evening she hunted up her marriage contract and reread its many clauses. Never before had she realized the care her father had shown in protecting her, a girl of fourteen, from the possible neglect of a husband who might not prove faithful. For there was this provision relating to the acquisition of a *havoo* — a second wife: " With the knowledge and consent of the first wife else he must forfeit the marriage portion of the bride."

She stared at the words. Exactly what did they mean? Her marriage portion? Was that the money she had brought to her new home? She remembered it had been such a fabulous sum that all Kashan had gossiped about it. So that was why Colonel Ali dared not let her see his new wife! Or was she a wife until Esmat had willingly withdrawn her objections? A fierce possessiveness made her blood course rapidly as she thought of this other woman, some fine city-bred beauty, taking her husband from her!

Even as she stared at her marriage contract, she thought of the events of the winter just over. She kept her refusal to go to the shah's reception and what it had led her to do covered with a black veil in her subconscious mind; she let the light of approval shine on her becoming haircut, her stylish attire, the house she kept so immaculately, the healthy children, the little boy now so normal and happy.

Carefully she folded the contract and placed it once more in its embroidered case. Then she turned toward the bed which her husband had not deigned to share with her and spoke angrily to his imagined presence: " There is no reason for you

to have another wife. I have not failed in my duty. I will not let you go; I will not let that woman have you."

Even as she said it, she changed from a listless, disappointed woman to one whose eyes had become narrow slits and whose mouth straightened into a red line of determination. " He is mine, he is mine! Ali is my husband! " she cried. " No one can ever marry him unless he pays my dowry. I will never give my consent — never, never! " Her voice trailed off in the silence of the night and she flung herself weeping on her lonely bed.

CHAPTER 14

WHEN ALI, THE MAJOR HAPPY IN HIS PROMOTION, BROUGHT his family to Teheran, he was content for a short while. But it was not long before he found his domestic ties irritating: he resented the yoke with Esmat, whose arrival had brought him ill luck; his pride in his son wavered with the threat of his lameness; his purse felt the pinch of the medical fees. His happiness vanished and restlessness took its place.

After Esmat refused to go with him to the shah's reception, he reviewed in his mind the women he had met in the past four years. Who among them was the type to accompany a major to such an affair? He could think of only one — the daughter of a former diplomat who had spent so many years away from her homeland that she was more at ease without a veil than with one. He had met her in one of the villages of Shimran, where he had been sent to assist in conscripting young men for the army. His senior officer had taken him to call on a cousin who had recently returned from abroad, and during their visit, the sister, a very poised young lady, had entertained them with accounts of her travels and they had learned that she was an accomplished horsewoman.

The young officers made her promise to ride with them to Seven Falls, above the mountain village of Avin. She agreed, provided her cousin or brother could go with them. The summer before Esmat came to Teheran the three young men and the young woman enjoyed many rides together, usually ending by going to her father's home in Shimran, where Afsar served them tea. With her short, curly black hair and neat, close-fitting clothes, she was always, everywhere, at her ease.

During the past winter Ali had arranged to ride with Afsar and her cousin in the direction of Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim,

where snow rarely interfered with their plans. He remembered now her trim figure on a fine blooded Arabian stallion and her calm control over the spirited horse. Ah, she was a real lady! He found himself comparing her to the way Esmat looked on the day of her arrival from Kashan. *She is a woman from the village,* he thought, *out of place in this modern city.*

For Ali's tastes, his entire outlook on life, had changed during his years in military service. He had learned to simulate what he did not feel, pretending affection even while he found himself wondering what the remedy for the old-fashioned ways of his family might be. When Esmat was picked up unconscious outside the garden door and he realized that she had done something to prevent her presence at the shah's reception, his mouth set in the stern lines his junior officers had come to recognize as a warning signal. After hearing the doctor's opinion that an illegal abortion had been performed with Esmat's consent, Ali's tolerance of her ignorance and fanaticism changed to vitriolic hatred.

He had gone to the royal reception without his wife. There he had seen Afsar again, and found her even more attractive in her smart evening gown than in her afternoon dresses or her riding habit. For the first time in his life he had become acquainted with a woman who was his social equal, a woman willing to accept his friendship while she kept him at arm's length. He resolved to see more of her.

At the next large reception, soon after the shah's affair, Ali sought out Afsar. She was dressed in a golden brocaded gown, with a filmy scarf draped over her bare shoulders. " You are very beautiful this evening," he told her, bowing over the hand she extended. His kiss was more fervent than customary; he held her slender hand longer than usual, before he let her withdraw it.

" Thank you," said Afsar. " But where is your wife? I missed her the other evening too."

" She is ill — she is really seriously ill," he said briefly.

Afsar smiled understandingly. " How lucky for her! She did not want to unveil anyway, did she? Most women from the provinces are bound by habit. See, there is one now — how

embarrassed she is! I'm sure no one is noticing her, even though she thinks they all are."

Ali replied: " Her husband is a lawyer from Kashan; he's a member of Parliament. See how she tries to hide her hands." They both laughed at the woman's uneasiness.

Although he wanted to remain by her side, Ali dared not, for he saw the Kashan lawyer watching him. He was relieved when Afsar's brother approached. " May I meet you tomorrow at the Military Hospital Crossroads? " he asked. " Your brother and I will have horses."

Afsar agreed readily. " Ten o'clock. We will all be sleepy, but a ride will be good before lunch."

She nodded a cheery farewell as her brother came up. Afsar decided to learn more about the wife of this handsome man, so she asked her brother to introduce her to the Kashan member of Parliament and his wife, well aware that Ali's wife had recently arrived from Kashan. Afsar had no intention of being second choice in any home. She desired no competitor; she wanted a husband of rank, of good family, of wealth. Ali might well be that man.

The Parliament member from Kashan was pleased to meet such a charming lady. Afsar turned to his wife. " Those are very lovely pearls. Are they heirlooms? "

The little lady blushed with pleasure. " Yes, my parents did not always live in Kashan; they were pearl merchants in Bahrein at one time."

" Yet you did live in Kashan? Do you know the family of the Motavali? "

" Indeed I do! Colonel Ali is his son, and his wife's mother and I are close friends. They are the wealthiest and most influential family in Kashan."

" I understand his wife is seriously ill," Afsar said casually.

The lawyer's wife was not above a little gossip, but she did not feel that the crowded reception room was the place. " Shall we find a smaller room where we can sit down? " she asked.

Afsar smiled as she led her new friend away. The two spent some time apart from the men and Afsar found out many things that interested her. She learned that the servants had

reported that Colonel Ali was furiously angry with his wife. Was it true that their son was abnormal, she asked.

" The boy is lame; he inherited it from his mother, whose uncle was crippled," the lawyer's wife told her. " Divorce is impossible. She has a fabulous dowry which he would forfeit! "

" But if they are so wealthy, what difference would that make? "

" You know how men are — no matter how much money they have, they don't want to give up any! "

Afsar decided they had gossiped enough, and they returned to the glittering reception room. She knew now what she would say to Colonel Ali when he sought her hand — as he would one day, she was confident.

When they rode together the next day, Colonel Ali told Afsar and her brother of his plans to purchase a new home on the Avenue Pahlavi, and after their ride he took them to look at it. Pointing out the beautiful mansion, Ali said, " It will be nearer my work at the barracks, and nearer to the palace and other important centers."

" Will your shy little wife who won't attend receptions like such a home? " Afsar asked.

Colonel Ali laughed shortly. " She would be out of place here. I am sending her and the children back to Kashan before long."

" Really? " said Afsar, then added, " There will be many such situations in families where the wives prefer to be old-fashioned."

" Well, I have made up my mind! She can keep the children — her parents and mine will provide for them and her. As soon as my son is dismissed by the doctors, I will send him to Kashan too. I should never have brought them to Teheran."

That evening Afsar was very gracious to him. Like any foreign woman, she led him on to the declaration of love that she knew was forthcoming. But when he told her he must have her as his wife, she said: " There is no hurry; come to me again when you have your new home and I will give you my answer."

" Let us become engaged, at least! " begged Ali. " Let us

have that pledge — "

" Then you would want to be married at once! No, you have my answer. When you have bought the new home, you may seek me again."

Ali left, determined to have her at all costs. Divorcing Esmat would be easy enough, but divorce without her consent would mean the payment of her dowry, and he was well aware that the sum would be impossible now when sickness and new uniforms, and the usual gifts that a new rank had entailed, and the occasional gambling he indulged in, had greatly depleted his funds. And now, the new home, if he would marry Afsar!

As Ali imagined his future with Afsar, his blood coursed more rapidly. He scorned Esmat as she hovered like an avenging angel in the background of his dream, brushing her aside as incapable of intrigue, or of proving that he had been untrue to his marriage contract. She was a village woman who knew nothing and cared less about the life in the circles where his rank had placed him. It would be different if she were Afsar — no one could ignore *her*.

Accustomed all his life to money in plenty, Ali had never known what it was to be handicapped by lack of funds. His new rank meant a larger salary, but he had recently purchased some property northeast of the city, expecting to clear the mortgage on it before he bought the Pahlavi place. *Another mortgage on that property is possible,* he thought. *And father has sent me a thousand to cover my son's expenses; I can use that and pay it back later. I will figure some way* —

Scheming and planning, longing and hoping, the days fled by until Ali accomplished his plan and was able to show Afsar the deed to his new home, mortgaged of course, but in his own name, nevertheless. He claimed her promise, and since he had had to wait so long, the wedding followed promptly after the engagement ceremony.

It was the night of the first of Tier, the tenth of July, when Colonel Ali and Afsar gave their soiree celebrating the completion of their *Aqd,* the legal ceremony of marriage. The guest list included the newly appointed minister of war, and many distinguished members of the cabinet. Even the prime

minister had honored them by accepting their invitation, for Afsar's kinsmen were from one of the most outstanding and renowned families of ancient Iran.

The new home on Avenue Pahlavi was a blaze of lights; the garden, beautiful with summer flowers, was strung with electric bulbs of varying colors following the pattern of the Persian flag, red, white, and green. Tables laden with drinks were discreetly hidden behind the shrubbery, and white-coated servants passed trays loaded with Shiraz wines, vermouth and gin, vodka and gin, and Arak, the ancient drink of Iran. Afsar, clad in a strapless evening dress of chiffon, black as her glossy hair, stood beside Colonel Ali to welcome her guests. Beautiful always, that night there was richness in her soft eye shadows, in the piquancy of her plucked eyebrows, in the rosy fullness of her sensual lips, in the curly hair drawn back to reveal shell-like ears and delicate pearl pendants. As she moved, an exotic Parisian perfume seemed sometimes to cling to her, sometimes to hover over and emanate from the tall white yucca blooms in the flower bed near her.

Conversation and laughter, music and compliments, drinking and nibbling at sandwiches and nuts, filled the evening until dinner was announced and the servants directed the guests to the beautiful, tiled basement room set with long tables, loaded with food. A stream, diverted from an underground water channel, flowed through this room, coursing swiftly over the blue tiles into a tiled tank where goldfish swam lazily. The exclamations of joy over the coolness of the room, the loveliness of the clear running water, the abundance of good food, the delicious flavor of old wines, gratified Colonel Ali and Afsar.

When the clock in the British Legation a quarter of a mile away chimed midnight, the guests were enticed by the soft music of the band in the garden to return to the shadows and the beauty of the out of doors. A platform had been laid over the garden pool and Colonel Ali and Afsar started the dancing.

The climax of the evening came when several professional women dancers, clad in village costumes and jingling tambourines, performed. The guests clapped in rhythm to the

music, faster and faster until the dancers sank in apparent exhaustion before the prime minister, who graciously cast golden coins into their tambourines. Others followed his example until the dancers withdrew, content with the gifts of the evening.

More dancing, more drinks, more laughter — the night sped by. Early dawn brought more food, more laughter, until finally the farewells were said to a hostess radiant at the success of her first soiree, and a host more proud of his wife than ever before, for had not his home been graced by the elite of Teheran?

When he had bid his last guest good-by, Ali complimented Afsar as he had Esmat on her wedding night. But Afsar, undressing in the soft light of dawn, gave him a cool kiss, glanced in the mirror, and knew that what he said was less than the truth. She knew that it was due to her beauty, her experience, her knowledge of the correct etiquette that this first dinner of Ali's for the *A'ayon* of the capital had been such a success.

CHAPTER 15

THE SUMMER AND ITS MANY SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS WAS scarcely gone before Colonel Ali found that maintaining two establishments depleted his funds more rapidly than he had anticipated. Worried, he tried to think of some way to increase his income.

As an officer of junior rank, he had bribed his superiors often enough to know that this was the simplest and easiest method of acquiring riches in Iran. Yet he also knew that the shah was trying to stamp out this insidious practice. If he wished to increase his income this way, he would have to do it in some other place than Teheran, somewhere far away from the eye of His Majesty.

The annual conscription of troops from the villages was due in the month of Shahrivar, the first month of autumn. Ali determined that he would be the officer in charge of this operation in as remote a province as possible, and he managed to arrange that the conscription among the Bakhtiari came under his surveillance. Far from Teheran and the possibility of a visit from his Shah-in-Shah, he commandeered the finest room in a village of the tribal area. His minions carried out his orders, and notification of the conscription of the youth of the province was sent to the farthermost tent dwellers. Then Colonel Ali sat down to wait. He had stretched his web over the mountain area; surely succulent flies would soon be caught to satisfy the hungry spider in its midst. Day after day, newcomers were inducted into the army and told to return at a certain time when a lorry would convey them to the area training camp. Ali was strict in his orders that one and all must enroll for the full two years.

At length the tribal chieftains brought their sons in response

to his commands. These were the prey that he had been awaiting. Apparently treating them as severely as the villagers, Ali insisted that the youths remain and accompany him to army headquarters. Nevertheless, after a few days' delay, one by one the Bakhtiari leaders returned to the mountains, and, oddly enough, their sons and heirs of military age went with them.

A rumor was heard that if sufficient inducement were offered, even a village *Kad Khoda's,* or supervisor's, son might escape military conscription. Sheep and goats, donkeys and horses found their way into the caravansary yard of the village, only to disappear in an uncanny fashion by night. And for each fine riding horse, for six sheep, for eight goats, for three donkeys, a village son or a tribal heir was allowed to return home, a paper of dismissal from army service in his possession, certifying that he was urgently needed there. So carefully had Colonel Ali laid his plans that when the required time had expired, all was ready for his departure. Forty young men were crowded into an army lorry to begin a new life in a military encampment.

The colonel's car followed leisurely after the lorry. His chauffeur and orderly sat silent in the front seat. Each knew that the other had received a bribe sufficient to keep his mouth closed concerning the proceedings of the past weeks. They were satisfied; yet each knew, also, from the size of his own bribe, that the colonel himself was richer by thousands of tomans as a result of this visit to the Bakhtiari province.

Before he sought Afsar in his new home, Colonel Ali made his report to his commanding general. He was detained only long enough to record the arrival of the new group of troops. The sun was setting, its golden light filling the blue-and-gold reception room where he found Afsar. As he held her in a hungry embrace, he gave her a small velvet box. Afsar was greatly pleased when she opened it and found a bracelet of golden flowers. She snapped it on her arm and her dark-brown eyes sparkled as she raised them to the colonel who stood watching her. "It will match my brocaded evening wrap. It has the same flower motif in it."

" Gold is your color," said Ali as he lighted a cigarette. To himself he added, " Gold is your price too, if I am to keep you with me."

Just as Colonel Ali thought he had arranged his personal life to his liking, the shah of Iran decided to visit the barracks where he was in command. This was not an unusual occurrence. Often the Shah-in-Shah appeared, unannounced, at dawn at some field kitchen to inspect the food; again at some unplanned review of troops at six in the morning, just as the bugle sounded. No one knew where or when His Majesty would appear. All were terrified lest something be amiss, and rigid discipline prevailed in all the camps in or near the city.

On this particular morning it was with a foreboding of evil that Ali watched the military figure of his shah walk past his men standing rigid at salute. Suddenly His Majesty stopped, snapped an order to a restless soldier. The man jerked to attention, opened his shirt. The shah leaned forward, examined the bared chest. " Lice! Look at them! Where did you get them? " He directed his question to the man, but included the cowering officers in the glance that observed each detail.

The terrified man could not speak. His neighbor replied for him, " He was out last night."

" Out? Where were you? "

The frightened man answered in quavering tones, " At the coffeehouse near the Kazvin gate."

The thundercloud gathering on the shah's face darkened with displeasure and anger. " Who gave you permission to leave the barracks? "

The man stood silent, visibly shaking with terror. The shah turned to the soldier on his right. " Were you out also? "

Fear swept like lightning over the entire company. Pale with fright, this man could only nod affirmatively. The frown on Riza Shah Pahlavi's face deepened into a scowl. He turned to his officers. " Who permitted these men to sleep away from the barracks? "

Like the soldiers, the group of officers in line stood silent before the wrath of their ruler.

" Why do you not answer? " thundered the shah. " Take

me to the barracks! "

Colonel Ali, livid and quaking with fear, followed his angry ruler. Investigation proved that lice were everywhere, that the men came and went freely upon the payment of their day's allowance to the officer in charge, that bribery was a common occurrence.

The Shah-in-Shah of Iran, was mercilessly angry. He ordered Colonel Ali Kashani and his subordinates to be led away under guard.

Esmat visited the hairdresser the day that a letter of commendation on her last village report arrived from the Mujtahid, feeling that she deserved this special luxury. She enjoyed sitting lazily under the ministrations of the Greek-Armenian hairdresser and it was soothing to be complimented on her lovely, wavy hair — even the years of wearing it in tiny tight braids had not destroyed its natural curl. The atmosphere was so relaxing that she ordered a manicure too. It was almost noon before she returned to her home.

As she lifted the knocker she admired her freshly manicured nails and her long, slender fingers. *I hope Ali comes to see me today,* she thought. But she sighed as she realized how long it had been since he had been home. Her mood lingered like a dream of desire, for her first question to the gardener who opened the door was, " Has the master come in? "

Esmat was not surprised at his answer. She had only indulged in a brief dream that things were not as she knew them to be. She decided to go to the hospital directly after lunch; Ali Naqi would notice how young and pretty she looked. For his age he was very observant — perhaps it was because he had to lie so quietly in his plaster cast.

While she was eating with her little daughters, the door knocker sounded with an insistent banging. Hussein, the gardener, shuffled to the gate, opened it a little, and stood listening to a man speaking quickly.

Esmat rose. " Who is it? " she called.

" Two military men," said Hussein from the gate.

" What do they want? "

The gardener threw out his hands in a gesture of implication, saying: " No one knows what the army wants these days! Some things that the colonel wants sent to him — "

At the mention of her husband Esmat hurried across the garden and stared in surprise when she saw the two young men before the door. They were equally surprised at the appearance of such an attractive young woman. The lieutenant recovered his poise first. " The colonel has been removed to the city jail," he said.

Esmat clutched at the doorframe. " Why? What has he done? "

Forgetting their rank, the men answered simultaneously, " We cannot tell you."

Esmat choked as she spoke. " You don't need to; his enemies, I know, I know."

Their barriers swept away by the importance of their message, the two men told her the story of the inspection that morning. Two words struck Esmat as the tale rushed on: " lice " and " bribery." They were like the barbs on the desert thorn that used to cling to her silk chuddar; they wove themselves into and through the fabric of her mind, tearing little holes as they went: lice, little itching, irritating lice; bribes, insignificant, unimportant bribes like the rug she had lost so long ago.

There was a pause in the rush of the story. The lieutenant said, " The colonel asked me to inform you and tell you to send him bedding and cigarettes."

Esmat pulled herself together. " Certainly, am I not his wife? Tell him — tell him that with the help of Allah I mean to get him released."

The two men glanced at each other. " *Insha Allah!* " said they in unison.

Then, in tribute to her youth and beauty, the young officers bowed low before they stepped into the military automobile. As the car disappeared around a corner of the lane, Esmat turned to the gardener. " Get me Hassan. We must send to the jail at once."

He studied the bricks beneath his bare toes before he re-

plied, " Hassan is an army chauffeur."

She looked uncomprehendingly at him for a moment, then said slowly: " You are right. You speak truly."

The difficulty of her situation struck her: she had no male servants save the gardener, for all the others had been in the uniform of the army and lent for the use of the colonel. There was no one to call on, no one to turn to for advice. Who dared befriend an accused man in Iran?

In despair she cried out: " I must have help! What shall I do? How do I know what to do? "

The gardener was an elderly man who had long been a trusted servant in the home of the Motavali. He fingered his hennaed beard, shifted from one bare foot to the other. " You would do well to consult a lawyer, a *vakil*," said he. " I will go to the home of the member of Parliament from Kashan and ask his gardener who is the best man for you to consult."

" Go! Go at once," ordered Esmat.

The lawyer that the member of Parliament recommended was a son of Kashan himself. He was obsequious in his attentions to his distinguished client, as well he might be, for he owed his education, his start in life to the kindness of his client's family. Yet when Esmat walked away from his office she asked herself what he had advised her to do. The sum and substance of the hour's conference had been that she was to pay no attention to her husband for a while lest the anger of the shah be directed to her relatives and to herself as well.

As she walked alone in troubled thought she asked herself: " Am I to leave Ali alone in his difficulty? Am I, his wife, going to desert him now? "

She forgot her jealousy of Afsar, she forgot her feelings of hatred and despair when she first knew that Ali had deserted her for another; she forgot the hours she had ridden the streets in her hired carriage hoping for a glimpse of her husband. She knew that there was no one to help Ali if she did not. Afsar would have nothing to do with one in the disfavor of the shah — and who could have imprisoned him but the shah? She was certain that " that woman " would never again speak to the colonel who had brought disgrace on her.

Her footsteps grew firmer as her decision to stand by her husband strengthened; her attitude became purposeful, her lips set tightly as she considered her course; her eyes seemed to grow larger as the courage reflected from her new determination shone in them. When she reached home, she threw down her gloves and her purse and, turning to her woman, recounted what had occurred in the lawyer's office.

She added: " The lawyer is right about doing nothing that will involve our families in Kashan. But he is greatly mistaken if he thinks I can do nothing at all! With my husband in jail, I have nothing more to lose. The shah won't stoop to imprison me! I will find many ways to help Ali."

Naneh, surprised at the change in Esmat, agreed. " *Afferin!* Excellent! Of course you will win! *Insha Allah,* if Allah wills! "

Esmat was filled with her new decision. For the first time in her life she said: " Allah *must* will it! You'll see — I will get him set free someday! "

But Naneh murmured over and over: " *Insha Allah! Insha Allah!* "

CHAPTER 16

THE RIVER OF TIME WHICH, RUSHING AT HIGH FLOOD, HAD borne them down the precipice of misfortune now reached the sands of the desert. It settled down to a slow trickle as it lost itself among the sands of erosions covered by the thistles of old growth sprouting new thorns — the eternal problems of everyday life confronting Ali and Esmat.

Seven days after the doors of the city prison closed behind Ali and his junior officers, they opened again for them. The men were led to an automobile which carried them quickly up the road to Shimran, the mountain area near Teheran. Qasr Kajar, the Government penitentiary midway between Gulak and the capital, high on a hillside situated in plain view of the well-traveled road, opened its iron gate in welcome to this new group of the shah's officers.

The sun smiled impartially on the prisoners entering the barren enclosure, yet they shivered as they walked across the graveled yard and glanced apprehensively at the armed guards watching them from the top of the high wall. Iron doors clanged. The sound of their heavy heels on the stone floor was menacing as they were led to their individual cells.

Ali walked his lonely cell during many a sleepless night or lay tossing restlessly until dawn approached before he dropped off into sleep. When morning awoke him, he took up his unhappy burden again, muttering to himself as he performed the routine duties required of all prisoners: "Kismet! It is fate! It was not my fault. Who can keep lice away from soldiers in Iran? Filthy beasts, living like cattle in the villages, they always have lice on them."

He seemed to see no connection between the bribery at the barracks and his imprisonment — it was always the lice he

blamed. He spent hours examining his own clothing lest the horrid insects begin to infest his prison apparel. He itched with his nervousness, and scratched long before there was need of it, so great was his terror.

At other times he would groan as he walked back and forth on his lonely march within the four walls of his cell. "How can a man escape his fate? Kismet of the Evil One! Who is there to help me?"

It was as though he were just born: crying, helpless, alone in the midst of curious spectators who would care only for his mere physical wants and could not understand at all the changes his spirit had undergone in entering this new world. Who was there to help him now?

He thought of his father, the Motavali. A little money, perhaps, but such men as he had no influence at court. His wife's father, the Mujtahid, was no better than his own, for who cared for mollahs or teachers of mollahs these days? Had not the shah horsewhipped one in Qum for daring to speak against the unveiling?

His Kashan wife, Esmat? Bah! What could such a woman do? She had not even dared to unveil — how could she dare to help him? He despised her for the timidity he knew she possessed. She had not even tried to recover her dowry money. She was like a child: indecisive, uncertain.

Afsar? His stunning, sophisticated wife? Ah, yes, Afsar could help him if she would. But she would not, he well knew. Curry disfavor with the court circle? Afsar? Never!

The days stretched into weeks, the weeks into months, the months brought no hope of release to the man in Qasr Kajar.

Ali had been correct in his surmise that Afsar would not help him. The establishment on Avenue Pahlavi was closed the very day that he and his subordinates were led to jail from the parade grounds by the military police. Afsar, taking her personal effects, left for her parents' garden in Shimran. Her departure was supervised by the police lest she seek to remove furniture or rugs of value and secretly dispose of them.

After she was driven away for the last time in a military car,

accompanied by two soldiers, seals were put on the door of her home, which proclaimed that the house and its contents were under surveillance of the Government of Iran.

The home behind the Parliament garden seemed too insignificant in comparison to the magnificent residence on Avenue Pahlavi to merit any attention.

Effat went to school as usual. Parvin played with Ali Naqi, who, though still in a cast, was permitted to be at home in the sun-filled garden. His cheeks were rosy and plump now as a result of the careful diet of vegetables, milk, and fruits. The servants discussed in whispers the event of Ali's imprisonment and impending trial as new rumors reached them from the bazaar via the gardener, but they always ceased their whispering abruptly when Esmat came within hearing.

Word came from the penitentiary that if the food he needed were sent to Ali it would reach him. Esmat supervised its preparation and saw that it was delivered every day before noon. Getting the food to Qasr Kajar was very difficult: busses were not plentiful and the crowds traveling to the mountain district were always large. Yet she carried on with her duty, ordering the man to tip the prison attendants lavishly as her lawyer advised her to do.

Money! Money! How fast it disappeared these days! During her girlhood, and carefree days as a young bride, there had always been plenty of money and she had never considered its value. Now it assumed primary importance in her life.

Clad in a neatly tailored black suit, she had interviewed the chief accountant at the new Government bank. She was the legal wife of Colonel Ali Kashani, the son of the Motavali — did he not have an account there? Like the lawyer, the chief accountant was pleased to confer with the wife of the distinguished prisoner. But he could help her in no way; Ali's account had been ordered closed; it was not available to her. Could he help her establish another account in her own name?

Esmat said she would consider it, but she left determined that she would not return until she had money to start her own account.

A carefully worded message told the Motavali that money

would be needed if Ali were to be released, and that his daughter-in-law and her children required financial help at once. His reply came in the person of Ahmad, his nazir, who had instructions to provide Esmat and the children with the necessities of life. The Motavali could not leave to come to her assistance lest he too become implicated.

Nor did the Mujtahid dare to do more than send secret funds to his daughter. Proudly she took these to the Government bank and deposited them and wrote her father what she had done.

A cautiously worded reply advised her against making deposits in her husband's former bank. The letter also included advice concerning the Veramin village, which her father was sure she had forgotten in the excitement of the past weeks. He reminded her that the crops would need attention now, that she would have more funds from them awaiting her, and he suggested another bank for these moneys.

Esmat considered the matter carefully, and finally came to the conclusion that pride had made her deposit her first money in Ali's bank. The day that Ahmad brought her the money from the new crops she said to Naneh: " My father is right. We will trust the foreigners with our money at such a time. I will not take any more to Ali's bank." So she took her few thousand rials from the Veramin village to the Imperial Bank of Iran on the Sepah Square. It was not much, but the account gave her a sense of security, for she felt now like an animal whose young are endangered. She grew stronger in her determination to harry the courts until her husband was released. Not a week went by without a consultation with her lawyer, not a night passed without her striving to concoct some new scheme of release for Ali.

No word came from her husband. Silence as of the grave enveloped him, and were it not for rumors from time to time that he had been seen at the court where his trial was ultimately to take place, and that food for him was accepted each day, she might well have believed him dead. Her friends and even her husband's distant relatives in Teheran assured her that death for him was to be preferred to imprisonment, which

was certain to end in disgrace and execution. They advised her that the wisest course would be to divorce Ali, forget about him, and plan a new life without him.

She thought about their advice carefully many times in the long nights when she lay awake with her problems, but always she discarded the idea of deserting her husband and leaving him to his fate. It was beneath her to do such a thing. Ali's life with Afsar she never considered worthy of worry. Did not all Persian men try temporary wives occasionally? Loyally, she began to clothe him with virtues he never had possessed, praising him continually to his children, and helping them plan what they would do when their father came home again.

Happy flights of her imagination were often followed by fits of depression when it seemed that Ali never could be released. For she heard of the sudden death of other occupants of Qasr Kajar and found herself looking for death notices of prominent people — " Cause of death: Heart trouble, or apoplexy," the notices invariably read. And always, she further observed, they had been men who were in disfavor with the court.

Usually, she admitted, they merited their punishment, if the rumors about town were correct, for they were political enemies of the ruler of Iran. But Ali! A few lice on his soldiers, a few bribes accepted, what was that in comparison with the deeds of treason others had committed or were endeavoring to carry out against the Pahlavi dynasty?

Further letters from the Mujtahid concerning his village added to her uneasiness. Getting to Veramin these days was another problem she had to solve — taxis were so expensive. One day she called Ahmad to her and asked his advice.

He looked away from her, fingering his prayer beads. " You need an automobile," he volunteered at last.

" And a chauffeur! " answered Esmat sarcastically. " No, I cannot afford that, even if I had the money for a car, which you know I do not have."

" Colonel Ali had a car," began Ahmad thoughtfully.

Esmat interrupted him: " Military, military! All he had was military: car, chauffeur, servants! The army took them away,

naturally."

"No. Not that one, there was another."

She stiffened into attention. "He bought a car? Did that woman get it?"

"I think not," said Ahmad. "She was not allowed anything except her clothing and jewels."

Jealousy stabbed Esmat. *Jewels that are mine by rights!* she thought. But to Ahmad she said: "Where would he have kept a personal car except in his own garage? They would have taken it away long ago."

"That is your good luck, for it was at the garage having its battery recharged when Colonel Ali was taken to prison."

"Can it still be there? So much time has passed — surely it has gone before this!"

Ahmad shook his head. "I passed the garage yesterday, and it was there. I was much surprised and made inquiries about it."

Esmat considered his news before she asked her next question, which she stated as a fact: "There isn't a chance in the world I could get it, is there?"

Ahmad shrugged his shoulders: "If we could find Colonel Ali's papers of ownership, I should say there was a slight chance for you, since you are his legal wife. Your lawyer may be able to advise you."

At the mention of papers, she jumped to her feet excitedly. "Papers of ownership! I saw many business documents in the *birooni* the other day."

Together they went to the desk where Colonel Ali kept his most valued possessions. Almost immediately they found what they were seeking. Esmat turned them over, reading them carefully. "If only we can get it! I would like to have a car of my own!" But after a moment she asked, "Who drove this car?"

"I inquired about that at the garage," Ahmad replied. "They told me that sometimes Colonel Ali drove it himself, sometimes a chauffeur. The gardener says he was a relative of his from Kashan, who went back there when the colonel was imprisoned."

" Ali had learned to drive? I never saw him drive — " She hesitated; it would not do to admit even to Ahmad how seldom she had seen Ali since her illness. Unexpectedly she added, " But the princesses, the grown daughters of the shah, are driving their own cars these days, why should not I learn? "

Ahmad spoke quickly: " But you must never do that. You must never drive your own car."

Esmat stared at him as the new thought took root, flowered in a flame of color in her face, bore fruit in a proudly upflung head and these words: " What one woman can do another can! I will learn myself! "

" It is not fitting for you to drive your own car. Your father would not approve."

But the fascinating idea held Esmat. " Chauffeurs are expensive and careless; my father would approve my economy in not hiring one," she replied.

He argued the point. " It would take you a long time to learn. It will cost you much, and you have to have a license to drive. Only a few women, and they well protected by their families, dare do such things. Have you forgotten your husband is a prisoner? "

" No! No! I can never forget that! But I did forget about the license. I will need photographs for that. There is a woman photographer on Lalehzar in the shopping district."

Recognizing her determination, Ahmad offered to make an appointment for her. He even suggested that if she wanted lessons in driving it might be well to engage the owner of the garage where the car was in storage.

The girls of Iran are taught to take menservants for granted. Esmat forgot her training in surprise at Ahmad's comprehension of the difficulties in her plan. " May Mohammed bless you for helping a woman in her distress! Colonel Ali will reward you suitably when I tell him of all you have done," she cried.

" *Insha Allah!* If God wills that he live to learn about it," Ahmad said fervently as he turned away.

Esmat watched him as he walked down the garden path,

her brow clouded by a frown and her eyes perplexed. As he reached the door to the lane, she called: "Ahmad! Come back!"

He turned in surprise. "I am going to make your arrangements, and to take these papers to the lawyer."

Esmat raised her hand in an imperious gesture. "You will not make arrangements for me to learn. You are right. It is not suitable that I should drive my own car."

Ahmad thought he understood women and their quick changes, but he was surprised into speechlessness. He nodded and waited for her next remarks.

"I will learn someday. There is no hurry now. But if you can get the ownership cleared and the car in my possession, I will hire a chauffeur for a while. It will attract too much attention if I drive it just now."

Ahmad looked down at his feet. His beads slipped slowly between his fingers as he considered the matter. "I will go to the lawyer first," he said and left the garden quickly.

It was not so easy as Esmat had anticipated to persuade the lawyer that she had a right to the colonel's private car. At length she succeeded, however, and he in his turn brought pressure to bear in many places before it was acknowledged legally that Esmat was the rightful owner of the big blue automobile. Then the repair bill and storage account had to be met, as well as a chauffeur engaged, before the car was finally driven into the garage of the garden behind the Majlis.

Esmat found the automobile to be the key to many doors, for people who had had no use for the secluded wife of an imprisoned army officer found many reasons to call on the owner of the fine automobile the colonel had driven. But she was cautious in making new friends, sensing that curiosity regarding the colonel's private life was one of the chief reasons she was being sought out. She kept herself busy and refused most invitations, especially when they involved the use of the car.

"People don't want me," she said to Naneh one day. "They want rides in Ali's fine car."

She went out less and less, save for business. She tired of the continual questions regarding her husband, and she knew well the moment that she left the room the conversation buzzed concerning Ali and the improbability that he would ever be released.

CHAPTER 17

ONE DAY, THREE MONTHS AFTER ALI'S INCARCERATION, ESMAT returned from a trip to her father's village to find the young lieutenant who had brought word of her husband's imprisonment awaiting her arrival. She sent for Naneh before she entered the room, for the young man was unaccompanied.

"Find out what he wants," said she. "He brought me bad news the first time; may God forbid that he is the bearer of more ill tidings."

A few minutes later Naneh reported: "He begs to be allowed to assist you in your work. He says that Colonel Ali purchased land in a village named Neaveran, and that it needs supervision."

Esmat stood in thought a moment, then said: "Oh, yes. I remember his mentioning it, but Ali Naqi was sick, and I was not feeling well, and so many troubles came up after that that I had forgotten it." She did not hesitate now to enter the drawing room where the young officer was standing with his back to the windows.

At her entrance, he came quickly forward and greeted her courteously, asking about her health and the news from her husband. She replied briefly, then asked him in turn how he knew about the village in Shimran.

The young man was most polite; he was anxious to help his former colonel's wife. He himself had inherited properties in Neaveran and one day, as he was supervising the construction of a fallen wall, he had seen his superior officer on the adjoining property and the colonel had informed him that he had recently acquired the acreage.

Esmat needed no confirmation of his remarks; she had plainly recalled the matter; she wanted to know when it was

that this incident had occurred.

There was nothing indefinite about his reply. " It was the year before you came from Kashan. I believe that the colonel had just returned from there."

Naneh spoke up: " Yes, he wrote you about it; you told me he bought it with his mother's inheritance."

Esmat turned to her. " True! That was the year she died." Again she addressed the lieutenant. " But has not the army seized this too? "

He shook his head. " The army is not concerned with such lands until the trial is over. Should he be found guilty, perhaps they might confiscate it to pay fines and expenses. But you should oversee it until his time of trial."

" That she can do, and well," declared Naneh. " The Mujtahid himself taught her."

" You will have to show me where it is," said Esmat.

" That is why I have come," said the young officer eagerly. " Let us go up to Neaveran tomorrow. You have a car."

Esmat was cautious. " Tomorrow is Friday. There will be many people on the roads. Can you not go with me on Sunday? There are more careful drivers on the road then."

He was not sure he could be released at that time. Might he send a message to her, making a date for the first possible day he was free? Esmat agreed, specifying that it be neither a Thursday afternoon nor a Friday; any other day would do.

After he was gone, she called Ahmad to go over the colonel's papers with her and see whether there were any concerning the purchase of land in Neaveran. They searched the desk in the men's quarters and finally found a mortgage certificate on certain property in the Shimran district. The word " mortgage " frightened Esmat, but Ahmad assured her that if one did not have the total purchase price of a piece of property it was very common to culminate the agreement with a mortgage on it.

Again she studied the papers. " I might lose it! " she cried. " It is forfeit if the payments are allowed to lapse."

Ahmad assured her that the second payment had been made, that it would be six months before the third was due. " It is fortunate that you have information concerning this, else you

truly would have forfeited it. However, before spring, the month of Farvardin, surely you can find the money for that payment."

It was Monday before the lieutenant sent word that he was free on Wednesday. The children pleaded for a picnic and, as the weather was perfect, Esmat yielded. Wednesday was sunny and warm, though the autumn leaves had fallen. The mountains were capped with fresh snow, but it clung like a discarded veil to the lower slopes, revealing rocks and valleys streaked with autumnal browns. They reached the village of Neaveran without difficulty.

The acreage belonging to the colonel was apparently productive, and in good order for there were no fallen walls. Guided by the lieutenant, Esmat interviewed the caretaker and sought to collect the money from the recent wheat harvest. The man was an astute villager who had had word of the imprisonment of the owner. He was startled and not especially pleased to have a young wife come around to collect what he had hoped to keep for himself and he sought to postpone payment. " Tomorrow I must go to the city for the seed for the autumn sowing. I will pay you then if you tell me where to bring the money."

But Esmat, with a uniform of the army to back her, and Ahmad and Naneh also in the background, insisted on payment of five thousand rials then and there. The man swore by the beards of the prophets of ancient times and the graves of his ancestors that he did not have it to give her. Reluctantly she admitted that he might have been taken by surprise, and at length she agreed to a postponement until the first of the week.

That evening when they returned to the city, Esmat showed the lieutenant the mortgage papers. It took a long time to discuss the proper way to register the payments, to be certain that there were no loopholes that would mean the loss of the property. Convinced at last that the lieutenant sincerely wished to help her, Esmat let him sit beside her while he called attention to this and that article in the finely written script that had escaped her attention. Surely it was only an accident that his hand touched hers as he pointed to a certain sentence. He

quickly asked her pardon, yet the thrill that had passed between them made her rise and gently accept his prompt farewells.

She stood on the porch watching the gardener escort him to the gate. As the door of the yard closed she turned thoughtfully to her woman and said, "That young man is very intelligent; I have learned much from him this day."

Naneh agreed that he was *khosh jens* — one with a happy inheritance. But she looked at her mistress sharply as she added, "When the colonel is released, he will reward him for his help to you."

Esmat, reminded of her husband again, sighed. "*Insha Allah!* If he be released." She added as she went into the house, "It was a real comfort to have a man — not just a servant — advise me again."

Neaveran, a village at the foot of the Elburz mountains, was well known as the site of the palace of Nasr-ed-Din Shah. The palace was called either Jehan Namaw, because of the views that lay about it — the city to the south, the majestic mountains to the north — or Sahib Garoneyeh, because its builder had seen three generations of time pass swiftly by during its construction. The trees that he had planted attested to its true antiquity, for some were gnarled and twisted by the winter's storms and some lay across the water channel where the earth had sunken. In later years others had been added, but the old ones, alive still, continued their twisted growth. The palace itself had not been allowed to deteriorate. Its many rooms, with their ancient tiles depicting the tales of courageous hunters pursuing game; the valor of the olden days of Iran; the devotion of Leilah and Mejnoun, the celebrated lovers of Iran; the fidelity of the tribes to the kings of Iran — all were still bright and their colors as fresh as the day they had been received from the tilemakers.

Esmat and Lieutenant Jangju had had no opportunity to inspect these ancient treasures the day they had visited Neaveran, but the young officer had promised her that another time he would show her the rooms of the famous palace if she would

permit him to. At the time Esmat was too concerned with dealing with the caretaker to realize he had taken her seriously when she replied, " Yes, yes, someday I will go — "

But Lieutenant Jangju did not forget. Several weeks after their first trip he again presented himself at the door of the garden near the Majlis.

Hussein recognized him at once and escorted him to the reception room, where he walked slowly up and down, inspecting the rugs on the walls, the curtains at the windows, and the vases on the many small tables. Near the big south windows he paused and looked out. Esmat was crossing the garden, clad in a dark silk dress that flattered her slender figure. As he watched her, his eyes grew dark, his tongue moistened his suddenly dry lips, his scrutiny was too intent to be casual. He tried to conceal his feelings as he went forward to greet her.

She was genuinely pleased to see him, although she had forgotten her casual promise to visit the palace. Twice she and Ahmad had gone to the village to supervise and to collect the money which the caretaker had not brought down on the morrow as he had promised. On the second trip she and the faithful steward triumphantly brought away a bag of silver coins. Lieutenant Jangju listened to her account of the trips, then inquired solicitously after her health. An hour passed pleasantly before he reluctantly bid her farewell. Esmat had promised to accompany him on the following Wednesday when, in addition to overseeing the property, they would visit the palace. He had cleverly forestalled a possible refusal by saying that his mother, who had visited the old palace as a girl and wanted to see it again, wished to go with them. He would have an army car for the afternoon and he expected Ahmad and Naneh to accompany them.

When he had gone, Esmat and Naneh agreed that it would be a most pleasant outing. " A surprise visit will be good for that caretaker, and everyone says the palace is worth seeing. Besides, I should like to meet that young man's mother; I've heard she's a remarkable old lady! " Esmat added.

On Wednesday the chauffeur came for the Kashani trio first, then called at a large, beautiful garden near the Dowlat Gate.

There was a short wait before the young lieutenant appeared alone. His mother was ill, he said; he was so sorry. Did Esmat think they should postpone the trip? Esmat felt she was properly chaperoned by her own servants and suggested that they continue as planned. Perhaps his mother could go along another time.

But a surprise awaited them at Esmat's property — the underground water channel had caved in. When Esmat reprimanded the caretaker for not notifying them, he became more surly than usual and replied rudely: " Am I God or his Prophet that I can do all you order me to do? This channel is inhabited by an evil jinni; every year it caves in! "

" It won't this time, if we repair it," declared Ahmad, looking sternly into the man's shifty eyes. " You will keep it in condition or you will find another place to live."

As a result of the unforeseen complications, there was not time to visit the palace that day. When the party reached the city, an agreement was made that the following week, when the lieutenant's mother was well again, they would inspect the progress of the channel repairs and enjoy the beauties of the palace of Jehan Namaw.

Two days later a servant from the Jangju family brought Esmat a gift of eggs, butter, and *maust* from the mother, who regretted that she had not been able to accompany them; she was much better now and was looking forward to the proposed excursion on Wednesday. Esmat was much pleased with the fresh foods from the Jangju farm, declaring she had not had such *maust* since she was in Kashan and the butter and eggs were far superior to those they purchased in the city.

When Wednesday arrived and they called once more at the garden near the Dowlat Gate, a plump, keen-eyed lady joined them, and as they rode along together she entertained them with many tales of former days in Teheran. It seemed as if she was determined that Esmat should forget her imprisoned husband, for never once did she refer to him, even when their car passed the penitentiary at Qasr Kajar. Nor did Esmat think of him either, for at that moment the old lady was telling them how she had gone down in a bucket to inspect a water

channel when she was younger and how much she had learned of arch construction then.

At length they arrived at the channel opening where they found the heavy rigging in place and men working slowly. From the pile of dirt near the opening it seemed that little had been accomplished. The lieutenant's mother said to Esmat: " If you want to make them really work, do as I did; go down there! If I wasn't so fat — " She stopped, and laughed as they all did at the idea of her going down in the little bucket.

Her suggestion appealed to Esmat, but the men and Naneh were horrified at the idea. " Women don't do such things. You might get hurt! "

" Why should I get hurt? I weigh less than that man — " She pointed to the well driller. The opposition crystallized Esmat's nebulous idea, and she grew stubborn. They could not dissuade her, backed as she was by the sparkling-eyed old woman who was reliving the days of her youth.

Esmat stepped into the swaying leather bucket and grasped the rope with both hands. The driller, surprised into silent acquiescence, turned the wooden wheel and lowered her slowly. The heavy rope creaked and she swung round and round until she steadied herself on the walls. When she reached the slimy, muddy bottom, she admitted to herself that possibly she had been unwise, for her ignorance of what to look for and the unaccustomed darkness made the trip apparently futile. She could only see a man crouched down, filling a bucket with the dirt he was scooping from the channel. He stopped working and stared in amazement at his visitor.

Esmat had had enough before he came to his senses and she signaled the men above to pull her up. Her shoes were muddy and wet from the bucket, and Naneh brushed furiously at the streaks of dirt on her skirt and jacket.

" May God forgive you! " she ejaculated. " Is it not enough to own a car and supervise your father's village and collect your dues from a lying villager? Must you risk your life and ruin your clothes doing a man's job? "

Esmat, catching a twinkle in the eyes of the lieutenant's mother, let her scold on. " Let us go to the palace," she said.

Lieutenant Jangju's uniform, a few tomans discreetly distributed among the gatekeeper, the gardener, and the man supervising them, were effective keys in opening the gate of the old palace. They lingered more than an hour over the beauties of the modern rooms and much longer in the smaller, darker, tiled ones, where they found the real antiquities of glazed-tile pictures with tiled scrolls of verses from the poets.

Was it chance that kept the older woman admiring the hunting scenes while Esmat and the young lieutenant sought to decipher the beautiful poems hidden in the curlicues of Persian? Was it fate that detained Naneh when she had been sent to get a lantern so they might read the dusty scrolls more easily? Why had Ahmad lingered over the weapons in the room where the hunting scenes were depicted?

Esmat had not realized that she and the young officer were alone in the twilight-filled room until the touch of a uniformed arm startled her with the same thrill that she had felt the night she had studied the mortgage papers. She drew back quickly into a doorway. " Why are you afraid of me? " said a low whisper. " Don't you know that I love you and have loved you since the first time I saw you? "

" What nonsense! I am a married woman — " Her reply was in a low voice and she spoke quickly, looking about nervously. It had been so long, so very long since Ali had loved her and it was comforting to feel that another man, one her own age, and so handsome, had found her desirable. Yet this could not be permitted. She tried to laugh it off, but her laugh sounded forced. " You are joking with me."

" Joking? I wish to God I were! "

The lieutenant stood between her and the others, whom she could hear talking in a room. She dared not move back lest she find herself in the darkness of an unexplored hallway, so she stepped forward instead and his eager arms seized her. " Divorce the colonel and marry me! " he pleaded.

Esmat struggled to release herself. " You have forgotten that my husband is a prisoner; I would not desert him now."

" You think he will be released, but he will never be, I am certain. The shah does away with officers who have been negli-

gent. You are so young, so lovely . . ." Yet he dropped his arms and stood aside when she continued to struggle against his embrace.

Esmat was afraid now, for she felt herself trembling with a strange yearning. *I could love him,* she thought to herself, yet she called out: " Ahmad! Do you not have a match? Naneh has not found a lantern, evidently, and I want to read this last tile before we go."

Lieutenant Jangju heard Ahmad coming, but he whispered once more: " Why did you call him? I will have you someday! Heaven knows I cannot live without you."

Ahmad entered as he finished speaking. Esmat had moved away from him, and was pointing to a tile covered with dust and cobwebs. She tried to act as though nothing had happened, but her heart was beating too fast, her cheeks were flushed, and she found herself thinking — repeating — *I could love him; he really loves me; but Ali! Ali is still my husband. He needs me; no one can help him but me.* Then another thought tempted her: *He deserted you for Afsar. Maybe Ali does not love you.* She answered it when she turned to the others and said quickly, " It is time we were going home."

Back in the city Esmat said little to her host, but thanked his mother many times for her company on such a pleasant excursion. Naneh, clever in the ways of love and lovers, saw in her manner toward the lieutenant that something had occurred. She kept her counsel, however, and Esmat hoped that no one had noticed her unnatural excitement or had caught the farewell that Lieutenant Jangju whispered as he leaned over to kiss her hand: " You will be mine someday, my beloved."

CHAPTER 18

THE CAVED-IN WATERCOURSE WAS NOT THE SIMPLE REPAIR JOB that Esmat had anticipated. Twice in the following week Ahmad had gone to Neaveran and reported to Esmat how slowly it was proceeding. On the third trip she decided to accompany him. She plucked up her courage and again insisted on going down in the leather bucket. This time she was rewarded by seeing a long, low, arch tunnel of brick extending from where she stood to a distant shaft of light. Even to her inexperienced eye, it seemed ready for the stream of water needed to refresh her fields. The winter wheat had turned a rusty green, the ground was caked around the tiny plants, and the overseer predicted a very poor crop because of the shortage of water at this vital time.

When the bill for the repairs came in, Esmat was shocked at the figure although she had tried to anticipate it. She longed to discuss it with the lieutenant, but she felt that asking his help would be encouraging him, so she decided to write to the Motavali instead. Perhaps he would send her the money, which she could not spare at the moment.

Winter settled down in earnest, but it still was not cold enough to cover the water tank in the garden. Each morning Hussein examined it for traces of ice. Although it seemed very cold, the cement pool remained unfrozen, and the sun was warm and pleasant if one sat on the sunny side of the wall where the winds did not reach one.

It was on such a day that Lieutenant Jangju appeared again. It had been long enough since the afternoon at Neaveran for the episode in the tiled room to have lost some of its vividness. Yet Esmat's resolutions never to see him again collapsed when she saw the tall uniformed figure waiting at her door. " Let him

in," she said to the gardener who had announced his arrival. " Perhaps he brings news of the colonel."

He strode quickly up the path to the porch where she was standing and greeted her politely, but he assured her he had no news of her husband. Had they received no word either? Esmat said that although she had heard nothing, she was certain that Colonel Ali was not dead, for they had not been summoned to remove his ashes; there was still reason to hope that he might be released.

The weather was beautiful, said the officer. Many foreigners had taken advantage of the improved road to Lashgarak to ski there; some of the Persians were going up each week to watch them. Wouldn't Esmat like to see the sport? " Women from the Legations are skilled on skis; it is a beautiful sight to see them," he added coaxingly.

" Snow play! I have read of it! We had so little snow in Kashan, I had hardly ever walked in it before I came to Teheran." Forgetful of her position, and her resolutions, she answered him as quickly and eagerly as a young girl. But it was only for a moment, for she said after a pause, " It is very far to Lashgarak."

" No distance at all for a car like yours. It is only ten farsakh, forty miles, to the hills near the Jaja Rud, the river. It is a truly wonderful sight," he repeated.

Parvin and Effat had joined their mother and were listening starry-eyed to the lieutenant.

" Why not take the children and go tomorrow? I'll show you the way. Of course I will have my own car, but there will not be room enough for all of us — my sisters are going also."

What a persuasive voice, what a smiling, eager face, what an invitation to wonders she had never seen: so near, so accessible! Why not go? Why must she always stay home? Excitedly Esmat promised to have the car, chauffeur, servants, and children ready on the morrow, assuring herself when the young man had gone that with his sisters and her children present, it would be quite all right.

In the morning a bitter wind was blowing, but the sun was shining as usual, and as long as its rays reached one, no un-

comfortable cold penetrated to chill the body. They left early, following the lieutenant's advice that the roads were quite empty at nine in the morning, whereas by eleven they would be crowded. At three they would start back before others left the skiing slopes. Everything was so well arranged, it seemed there could be no slip. Yet as they sped over the hard roads, up and up the four thousand feet to the smoothly rolling hills and steeper mountains overlooking the Jaja Rud, the steering wheel suddenly seemed difficult to manage. The chauffeur stopped.

" What is wrong? " asked Esmat quickly.

The man got out, inspected the tires, and reported a slow leak in one of the front ones.

The other car drew up and the two chauffeurs changed the tire quickly. As Esmat watched them repair the damage, she wondered what she would have done if she had learned to drive and had been alone.

A half hour later they reached the place where the two cars could be parked on the wide, sunny roadside. Then both parties carried rugs, quilts, and food over the hill where there was a perfect view of the skiing. Delayed by the tire change, they found that others had arrived earlier. Many men, women, and children were laughing and playing in the snow. So vast were the distances etched by valley shade and hilltop sun that the people seemed like dolls in comparison. Their voices came faintly sliding down the slopes, scarcely audible at first, then louder and clearer as the players on sleds and skis drew near. Laughter echoed strangely from the usually silent rocks as sleds overturned, or as skiers tumbled in the soft snow.

The Kashan family had never seen such a sight. Their reaction pleased the lieutenant and his sisters greatly, and it was a happy, carefree group that sat down on the rugs, pulled the quilts over their knees, and lunched on the meat cakes, bread and cheese, fruit, and the hot tea from the samovar the servants had brought with them. Such was their enjoyment that it was four instead of three when they all reluctantly returned to the cars. The sun disappeared behind a cloud and the wind grew chillier, and many others decided it was time to start also.

They hurried to get underway before the roads became crowded, but when the chauffeur pressed the starter, the engine did not respond. It would not even whir with a sign of life. " You will have to crank it," said Ahmad to the chauffeur. " We can't try this any longer."

The men finally located the crank and the chauffeur spun it many times in vain. Many automobiles passed them as they sat there, giving them little leeway for the plan the two chauffeurs had in mind: towing the car down the slope. At length the road was cleared enough for them to attach a rope to the military car and tow Esmat's car until the motor began to sputter. It was released from its tow and the automobile with the lieutenant and his sisters went on ahead. After a short distance they stopped and waited for the other car; when it caught up with them they noticed that its radiator was steaming. The chauffeur replied to their questions that he had filled it that morning and stubbornly denied that he was at fault. But the steaming grew worse as they went on until finally Esmat ordered the car stopped until the motor cooled and the steaming ceased.

Esmat was worried. First the puncture, then the battery, now the radiator! At her command the chauffeur climbed down the hill to the village at the side of the river and returned with a leather skin full of water. He opened the radiator and poured some in.

" It does not need water! " he said in surprise. " I told you I filled it before we started."

They tipped the village lad who had carried the waterskin, started the motor again, and went on for a while, happily believing all was as it should be. But once more the steaming began and they were forced to stop to cool the engine. The men looked at each other in dismay. What could have gone wrong? The army chauffeur had the answer. " It is frozen," said he sagely. It had been cold on the mountainside, and the car had been left uncovered — it was the chauffeur's fault, they said. But he argued that the other car had not frozen. For a while no one could answer him until Ahmad suggested that perhaps the forward car had thrown a shadow on the rear one

which made it freeze while the one in the sunshine did not.

Naneh stubbornly declared it was the chauffeur's fault. " It is not his car — what does he care? " The others silently added their accusations to hers as they climbed back in the car. There was nothing to do but try to go on. Stopping and starting, running a mile at a time, they finally covered some distance when suddenly, to everyone's surprise, the radiator stopped steaming and the car ran as smoothly as usual.

It was dark and cold and the little girls were crying with hunger, weariness, and excitement when finally they drove into their own garage. Esmat had not spoken for a long time. The responsibility that had been hers had frightened her; was it not her car, and her own careless chauffeur?

When at last, cramped, cold, and weary, she stepped out of the automobile, she spoke what she had been saying to herself for the past hour. " Ahmad, you may sell this car tomorrow."

The lieutenant, standing beside the garage door, heard her remark. " But you need it! " he protested. " You'll need it more in the spring. Why be discouraged by your first difficulties? "

She was too weary to argue. " I vowed to Allah that if he permitted us to reach home in safety, I would sell it to the first person who gave me a reasonable price for it."

" You will make a mistake," he warned.

" It'll be no mistake. This car is too valuable to ruin through ignorance."

Seeing that she was tired and worried, the lieutenant soothed her by promising to find her a buyer if she still felt the same way on the morrow. " If you change your mind, let me know," he called out as the military car drove away.

Fortunately the next day the car showed no damage from its partial freezing. And the battery trouble had been due to lack of water only. Yet Esmat would not change her mind, in spite of the pleas of the children and servants. Perhaps with the money she received she could pay off the mortgage on the Neaveran property and still have enough left to live on for a while.

When he came the next time, Lieutenant Jangju brought a

superior officer with him who was interested in the car. Esmat had already sent Ahmad around to the garages and bazaars and had a fairly definite idea of the car's value so she held out for a good price. It was with great relief that she saw the car driven out of her garage for the last time.

For a while life ran on monotonously. Always, every day, there were the food dishes to be refilled for her husband. She tried to vary the diet, but there was little variety to be found in the winter. There were many foods, but all of them lacked the freshness she coveted for her husband by the time they were carried to Qasr Kajar, five miles away. She longed to do more, to prepare more, to comfort her absent partner more through her ministrations.

The children seemed to have forgotten their father. Only Effat mentioned him occasionally. She had become plump and healthy after her siege of smallpox, and even the tiny scars had faded until they were scarcely noticeable. Now she was busy and happy at school. Ali Naqi's cast had been removed and he ran and played with his sisters and the neighbor's children. Sometimes as she watched them romp up and down the narrow path, Esmat rejoiced in her son's good health. But whenever she saw him walking with one foot in the watercourse and one foot on the bricks, as he loved to do, her heart leaped with fear that his lameness had returned and she would make him walk toward her, examining him closely as he came up. No. There was nothing abnormal in his gait.

How pleased Ali will be! she thought.

Whatever she did, whatever she thought, back of it all was the hope that Ali would be pleased. Pleased and proud of her when at last he entered the garden again.

Her most frequent callers were the family of the lieutenant. Sometimes the mother came and kept them all gay with her stories. She seemed to take a great interest in Esmat's affairs and, as well as bringing laughter to all in the garden, she brought sage advice to the young mother. The two sisters came regularly each week, and Esmat grew very fond of them, for they were like their mother — gay and genteel, never asking embarrassing questions about the absent husband.

Only occasionally did the young lieutenant himself come, but he often sent gifts of flowers from their greenhouse or foods from his village. These she always accepted, sending her thanks for his remembrance of his colonel's family.

Little children in a garden with high mud walls soon tire of their confinement. Parvin and Ali Naqi used to watch Effat leave for school, accompanied by Hussein, and beg to go too.

Esmat, worried over her husband, finances, and legal affairs, had little time for the two left at home. It was Naneh or Talaat who patiently built mud-brick houses with them in the courtyard and who filled their days with imaginary play in which parrots, crows, wagtails and flycatchers, mice and lizards, turtles and spiders, fairies good and bad, jinn and lulus all had their part.

They played "hide-and-seek," one hiding behind the big water jar, one lying quietly in the water channel behind the pomegranate trees, while Talaat called:

"Mouse, little mouse, little mouse,
Quietly come and quietly go
So the cat will not pounce on you!
Hurry, hide quickly, oh, little mouse, do!"

Then she would pretend to hunt for the children. Parvin, still slender and small, was always the quickest. No sooner had Talaat turned her head than she crid out: *"Ousta Salaam!* I am safe!"

One day, much to the children's delight, Hussein brought home a tiny sparrow which had not learned to fly. They made a cage for it, and fed it bits of food, and finally it grew quite tame. They were thrilled when it finally learned to fly, yet would come back to sit on their heads or shoulders, pecking at the bread they offered it.

Naneh taught them the old Persian rhyme:

"Sparrow, get up, sit not. Do not stay on our wall;
The rain will come and you will get wet;
The snow will come and a little ball of snow you will be;

You will fall into the pretty water pool;
You will go to the hands of the sweeper;
The sweeper will take you and give you to the butcher;
The butcher will kill you and give you to the cook;
The cook will cook you and place you on the rice before the king;

" The king will eat you and you will go
To the stomach of the king!
The sparrow said: ' Jiq! Jiq! *Bah! Bah!*
What a sharp sword that was with which
The butcher cut off my head!
What a hot bath it was the cook gave me!
Jiq! Jiq! *Bah! Bah! What a pleasant place is this*
in the stomach of the king.' "

Ali Naqi declared he would never eat a sparrow, although Naneh assured him the head was delicious. Both children warned her not to eat their sparrow! They were desolate when one autumn day the sparrow flew away never to return.

Fortunately that same evening their grandfather, the Mujtahid, arrived from Kashan. They scarcely recognized him, for he wore a felt hat instead of his turban. But he had not shaved his red beard. In the two years since his son-in-law's arrest he always sent his replies to the many communications from his daughter by trusted messenger, not daring to risk the possibility of becoming implicated in the accusations against his daughter's husband. Now, however, so much time had elapsed that he hoped the doings of the family of the former favorite were no longer of great interest to the Government of the shah.

Esmat was greatly relieved by his presence. He questioned her carefully and advised her sagely. After his first visit to his Veramin village, he complimented her on its management. It was that evening that he told her he planned to sell it.

She was greatly surprised. " It brings in a good income, does it not? Surely it is a fine investment! "

" Yes," he conceded. " But never would I have bought it could I have foreseen what the future held for you."

Esmat did not understand. He did not look at her as he made

his explanation. " It did not occur to me that Ali would not help you some, at one time or another." For a moment he was silent, then added, " But of course he could not when he was in prison."

" It was easy when I had the car. Now I will admit it is difficult and taxis grow more and more expensive."

" You were right to sell the automobile; you were a wise woman. Now I will sell the property and place the money in your bank for you."

Esmat had given an involuntary start when her father spoke the words: " A wise woman — " Would those words always follow her?

Aloud she said: " Thank God you approve! Naneh said I was foolish . . ."

That evening the children, who loved their grandfather's tales, begged for a story. This time he told them an old fable about the three thieves. Esmat had heard it many times when she was a child, but she had forgotten it. As she listened she realized that her father had selected it for her sake.

The Mujtahid sat cross-legged on the rug spread out on the porch overlooking the garden. Effat and Parvin pulled rose petals from the blossoms they had picked and made a neat little pile before him as he told his story, but Ali Naqi sat on his feet, flat soles against his body, heels directly under his hips, hands on his thighs, leaning toward his grandfather, listening with sparkling eyes.

" Once upon a time," the old man began, " many years ago, before this shah had made everything safe for his people, there were many thieves in the mountains of Iran.

" One day a villager was riding a donkey on a mountain path. He was leading a sheep, which was fastened with a rope to the saddle of the donkey. Attached to the rope at the neck of the sheep was a little bell that went ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling, whenever the sheep stepped.

" Three thieves passed by. One said braggingly, ' I can steal that sheep from that stupid villager and he will not know it.'

" The second thief said: ' I am more clever than you. I can steal the donkey that he is riding.'

" The third thief laughed. ' Bah! I am so smart that I can take away his clothes from him so that he will not know they are being stolen.'

" Together they agreed to put their boasted cleverness to a test. They would steal the sheep, the donkey, and the clothes of the stupid villager going alone up the mountain path. So the first thief sneaked up behind the rider and untied the rope from the saddle and the bell from the rope. He gave the bell to the second thief, with instructions to ring it until he was out of sight. Then the thief picked up the sheep and hurried away with it.

" After a few minutes the thief who had been ringing the bell: ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling, according to instructions, threw the bell away. The villager awoke from a snooze, looked back in surprise, and saw that his sheep was not following him. He pulled at his beard in amazement.

" The second thief stepped forward. ' Did you lose something? ' he innocently inquired.

" The villager replied, ' My little sheep that I had tied to my saddle rope is gone.' He started to turn his donkey's head in order to retrace his steps.

" ' You'll never find it that way,' said the thief. ' Get down from your donkey and hunt for it.'

" So the man dismounted, and, leaving his donkey eating thistles at the side of the road, hurried back along the path. When he had disappeared, the thief led the donkey away to a hiding place. After a while the villager returned without the sheep to find his donkey missing also. He scratched his head in perplexity.

" The third thief came forward. ' What is the matter? ' he asked.

" ' Thieves have stolen my sheep and my donkey.'

" ' How much were they worth? '

" ' The sheep was valued at five tomans; the donkey, ten tomans.'

" ' That's nothing to worry you, then,' said the thief. ' I have just lost a bag with two hundred and fifty tomans down this well. Get it out for me and I will give you fifty tomans.'

" The villager looked into the well. ' There's water in it! '

" ' Take off your clothes and go in! Water won't hurt you! Get my money for me and I swear I'll pay you well.'

" At that the villager stripped and let himself cautiously down into the water-channel opening.

" The third thief made off with his clothes.

" After vainly searching about in the cold water, the villager crawled out to find his new friend and his clothes both gone. He hunted about for a while, then picked up a stick and began hitting the air with it; round and round his body he hit the air as he walked on into the village.

" The astonished villagers gathered about him. ' Where are your clothes? What are you beating the air for? ' they asked.

" ' Thieves have stolen my sheep, my donkey, and my clothes; if I don't keep them off, they'll steal me too! ' "

Ali Naqi laughed with glee, grabbed a branch from a bush, and rushed out into the garden as his grandfather finished the story. The little girls sighed with pleasure, picked up their playthings, and followed him.

At length Esmat asked her father whether her properties could be taken, should the shah demand payment of all Ali's proved bribes plus the court fees. The lawyer had told her that it was usual to demand three or four times the amount secured by bribery in office.

The Mujtahid fingered his red beard thoughtfully. Then he smiled. " Sometimes it is well to pick up a stick and hit the air round about you. Who knows what might happen? "

CHAPTER 19

ESMAT WAS DESOLATE WHEN THE MUJTAHID FELT HE MUST return to Kashan. Her father had helped her in so many ways: approving her friendship with the lieutenant's mother and sisters, concurring in the advice the older woman had given her in the management of the Neaveran property; replenishing her bank account; complimenting her on the wisdom of the sale of her husband's car; introducing her to his friend, the Ostad of Iranian Literature at the University of Iran.

This kindly man became greatly attached to the children, especially Ali Naqi, whom he often invited to his home where Ali played happily with the other small boys in the garden. This left Parvin free to go to kindergarten and Esmat at liberty to visit her friends or to consult her lawyer more frequently, or to work over the intricate accounts her properties entailed.

One day she sat alone with her account book and an abacus. As she pushed the wooden counters rapidly on one wire or the other, the uninitiated might have thought she was playing with them. Yet her intent inspection of the neat figures written in the columns on the left-hand side of the page, the close scrutiny of the fine script extending from the opposite side of the page to the figures she studied so seriously, the sudden absorption with which she clicked the counters together, showed that this was not play but a very serious task.

Finally she laid both the abacus and the open account book on the low desk on the floor in front of her and called loudly: "Ahmad! Ahmad! Come here!"

Ahmad appeared so promptly that it was evident he had been expecting her call. He took in at a glance what she had been doing; he knew before she spoke what the trouble was. Yet he stood, patiently letting his prayer beads slip slowly

through his fingers, waiting for her to speak.

"That Neaveran village! It is only a pain in the head! We have made no profit at all these two summers. The caved-in channel cost us all that first season's profit; then the locusts ate the crops the second summer; and last winter we had heavy repairs again when the snow brought down so much of its wall. And the taxes grow heavier each year! Can we not sell it? Now! Before another season of possible loss?"

"The courts have ruled that property in the name of a prisoner may not be disposed of before his trial."

"I know, but I sold the automobile!"

"That was not real estate. Different laws apply."

Esmat nodded. "I forgot. But is there no way to get around the real-estate law? My father says there is no law passed in Iran but there is a way of escape from it. Perhaps some other lawyer could help us."

"What the Mujtahid says is correct. Unfortunately this property almost adjoins the Pahlavi summer palace of one of the younger princes. It would not be possible to dispose of it without attracting attention. No lawyer can change its location."

Esmat put her finger tip to her mouth in perplexity. "But what can we do?"

Ahmad studied the rug at his feet. "The Boy Scouts have a fine big camp at Manzarieh. It is not far from there," he said.

She considered this a moment before she threw out her hands, palms up, in a gesture of impatience. "What has that to do with us? Our headache is in Neaveran."

"The roads have been greatly improved to that region; property has increased in value."

"And they use all the water for sprinkling the roads and my crops are only half what they should be!"

"Yet the pool is nearly always full and the trees have kept green." He was silent awhile, then added, "It might rent for a summer place."

She clasped her hands together and her eyes sparkled as she caught his idea. "What a fine suggestion! Why did you not think of it sooner? People pay fabulous prices for summer

places in Shimran, I hear."

Ahmad shook his head. " In Shimran, yes! But not in Neaveran! Not yet. Perhaps next year, but this first year you cannot charge much or no one will rent it from you."

" We must look it over with that in mind. Let us see what expenses are needed to make it an acceptable summer place." She sighed as she added, " Another taxi fare! "

He encouraged her. " It will be worth it if you can find a good tenant."

" How can we do that? Who can help us? Who rents land up there? " She paused and then said: " I know! Lieutenant Jangju and his family have several places they rent each year."

She pulled out her writing portfolio, selected a reed pen, sharpened it carefully, and dipped it in the ink-filled sponge. As her pen moved slowly from right to left she hesitated often, seeking the correct word. She said nothing to Ahmad until she had finished, then she handed him the letter and gave him an order: " We will go and inspect it this week."

The reply from their military friend was prompt; he would gladly accompany them on their trip and give them what advice one so insignificant as he could offer; the day and hour she mentioned were acceptable to him. He signed himself her obedient servant, " Parviz Jangju, Captain in His Majesty's Army." That very afternoon the captain's younger sister called, and when Esmat told her what she had done and begged her to accompany them also, she gladly agreed.

When the day arrived, Esmat apologized for not having known of the young man's promotion. She congratulated him warmly, and forgave the family for not telling her when she learned it had been conferred on him only a few days earlier. Parviz Jangju flushed with pleasure at her words of commendation.

The party arrived without mishap at the village property, the mortgage of which Esmat had cleared by the sale of the automobile. Together they inspected the one-story house, with its three rooms along the north wall and two rooms along the eastern wall. A large window in one of the rooms overlooked the city of Teheran, while another framed the cement pool

bordered with lacy willows. Knowing little of the preferences of foreigners, Esmat felt certain that these pleasant rooms would be acceptable, if they were clean. They definitely were far from immaculate now: fallen plaster, broken panes, leaves the winter winds had tossed into the cobwebby corners, long-legged spiders clinging to the walls, dust and dirt everywhere. The caretaker had never occupied these rooms; his own quarters were at the other end of the garden near the opening of the water channel.

The suggestions that the captain made showed that his knowledge of renting summer houses was not superficial. He drew their attention to the kitchen — a dark, smoky room far away from the only possible dining room and a semibasement — quite unsuitable. " Why not convert this small storage room into a kitchen by building two small charcoal-burning fireplaces and a larger one for cooking with wood? " he suggested. " The small window on the street side could be made into a flue."

The bath was another difficulty, he pointed out. " Foreigners will not do as we do — go to the bath where hot and cold showers and proper attendants are at hand. Where can a bath be made for them without too great an expense? "

They studied all the rooms, even the outhouses near the caretaker's quarters, but they were unable to solve the problem. " Wait until we rent it. It may be no foreigner will come up here. If one does, let him suggest a location," Esmat said sensibly.

That evening, back at home near the Majlis, the captain and his sister accepted Esmat's invitation to remain for dinner. She took them into the family room, and the children were delighted with this man who played with them.

Once, when Esmat was out of the room, the captain asked the children whether there was news from their imprisoned father. Their replies were vague; he had been gone so long. Ali Naqi scarcely remembered him, but his remarks indicated that he looked upon his father as a perfect and superior being who would return before long and expect similar perfection from his son.

When Esmat returned, the young man and his sister intimated that it was useless for her to expect her husband to be released; few were, after so long a time. Had it not been three full years?

Esmat admitted the truth of their statement. " Three years is a long while. I grow very discouraged at times."

Nurine caught her brother's brief signal, and said, " Yesterday the family of the Shiraz rebel were notified to go to Qasr Kajar for his ashes."

" Only yesterday! I heard he had been killed long ago! He organized the rebellion against the shah, did he not? "

" Yes. Was he not imprisoned when your husband was? " Nurine asked.

Esmat did not answer. *Is it possible that after all this long time Ali too may be executed for treason?* she wondered. Perhaps they are right; perhaps he sought to usurp some higher office, and the shah knows it.

The captain noticed her silence. *She is losing hope,* he thought. *She has been so faithful to him; poor woman, it will go hard with her if he is killed.* Aloud he said: " Do not worry. He still has a chance. You may have him back here someday! "

" You are kind to say so. *Insha Allah,* the colonel will be returned to us soon. He will thank you for your good wishes," was all Esmat said.

They left her soon afterward, left her thinking of the future when her husband might return — or might not — which would it be? This time she could not keep the young captain out of the picture. She saw him in the Neaveran garden encouraging her in her despondency; she saw him pointing out the faults in crowded Shimran; she saw his look of compassion when he encouraged her to keep up her hope for Ali's release; she heard his refined voice saying: " Do not worry. He still has a chance."

It was inevitable that she compare his courteous treatment of her and the children with the way her husband had acted when she last saw him that day in the hospital. *It was Afsar, then; he loved Afsar, not me,* she thought. When he was released — or would he be released if she did not continue to work for

him? — would he find another Afsar? *I thought I would love him forever, but is this love if I compare him with Parviz? Perhaps it is only duty that drives me,* she thought.

She tried to picture the future realistically, but the faces of the two men, Ali and Parviz, were curiously intermingled: one who had loved and forsaken her, one who was encouraging her now not to lose hope. It was long before she could sleep — long before she had figured out a new way in which she might, perhaps, gain her husband's release.

For she decided she could not give up the struggle now, when the end might be in sight; it was too clearly her duty to continue to work incessantly for Ali's release.

The next week Esmat sent Ahmad with masons to work out the changes they had decided were needed on the Neaveran property. Then, after ten days, the captain wrote Esmat advising her to go up there herself; he invited her to go with him, his married sister, and their mother in the military car. Assured thus of chaperons, Esmat left Naneh at home.

When they had inspected the changes and had lunch, they decided that there was still time before dark to drive to Darband, four miles away, where the new palaces were being built for the shah and his crown prince. Esmat had not been there since she had sold her car. She was surprised at the many new and attractive summer homes that had been prepared for wealthy Persians and the diplomatic corps of the foreign community. " No one will ever rent my place if they can find even a room in Darband! That lovely river, those beautiful mountains and valleys so near, so accessible! "

But the captain and his mother were not discouraged. " Wait and see! We will advertise it in the *Messenger* next week. Not everyone likes a crowded place; that is what Darband will surely be! "

Before they parted company that evening, the captain's mother found a chance to talk to Esmat. " You have been a model of faithfulness; the poets of Iran should make a song about you! But there is really no reason why you should not plan your own life now," she told her.

Esmat raised her troubled eyes. " What do you mean? Have

you news? "

But the older woman laughed. " Don't worry! I know absolutely nothing about your Ali! But I think it is unnatural for a pretty young woman to stay tied down to a man who is as good as dead! "

Esmat saw the point. " You mean you want me to — " She stopped short, but Nurine finished the sentence for her. " We want you to forget your husband and marry Parviz."

The mother urged her gently: " You can do so much with your life if you will only forget your prisoner husband. After all he has done — everyone knows he had taken another woman — you can't really love him. Consider what it will mean to you — and to my son — if you will marry him."

Esmat listened to her. *How well she understands!* she thought. *She will know why I cannot do this.* When at last she spoke, her tone was scarcely audible. " It is my duty not to forsake him now."

So they left her, still urging her not to sacrifice too much for duty.

The advertisement appeared and, greatly to her surprise, it was necessary for Ahmad to take several groups of prospective tenants to see the place. An assistant secretary of the American Legation and his wife were charmed with the gardens, finding the distance from the city and its bazaars no barrier. When Ahmad reported the deal closed, with an advance of several hundred tomans paid, Esmat was delighted. She was curious, though, as to the reason they had rented it.

Ahmad grinned behind his hand. " God alone knows why foreigners like some things! The woman said the pool was so fine for swimming! Little does she know how cold the first opening of an underground water channel is! "

Esmat was amazed. " Imagine women wanting to swim in such cold water! "

Now that her property was rented for such a good price, it was only showing due gratitude to the family of Captain Jangju to invite them to her home again. They came for tea this time, but the three women brought an excuse from the

captain; duties prohibited his coming that day — another time he hoped to have the pleasure.

Esmat expressed her disappointment, saying that she missed his cheerful smile and that he had helped her as much as a brother could.

The older woman answered: "The other evening we urged you to marry him. Today we have come again at his insistence. There is no reason why you should wait longer for your husband. We hear from all sides that it is only a matter of time before you will be summoned to remove his ashes. Let us make plans for your marriage to our Parviz."

Esmat dared not interrupt lest they think her rude. She let these women, whom she admired so greatly, finish their pleas before she replied. Her long hours of lonely thought had borne fruit, for there was a tone in her voice and a simplicity in her statement that silenced them more than any argument could have. "My husband is alive. I shall never marry another as long as he lives," she said quietly.

They did not try to dissuade her. Instead, they said: "Let this make no difference in our friendship. Let us come and go as before and let us help you when we can."

The older woman's eyes showed a new admiration for Esmat that she did not recall seeing before. "No woman is worth having who is not faithful in her duty, my dear. I admire you for your constancy — though I am certain it will profit you nothing!" she said.

The young captain, encouraged by his mother, did not cease his attentions to the Kashani family. His gifts of village produce and flowers from his city garden kept him often in Esmat's mind. It was no wonder that she found solace in his continued respectful attitude; it was soothing to know that someone — someone handsome — was standing ready to do her bidding. The friendship of the Jangju family made the thought of Afsar less painful.

If it were not for Ali — but of course Ali was first; no one could entice her away from him; she would never be an unfaithful wife, deserting him when he was forsaken by all others.

The more she reiterated this, the stronger grew her resolve to get him released. And the more she endeavored to do this, the stronger grew the admiration of the young captain for a woman who stood by her husband through good or bad fortune.

CHAPTER 20

WINTER SNOWS HAD FALLEN HEAVILY ON THE ELBURZ MOUNtains for the fifth winter since Esmat had come to Teheran. She had learned to look toward Demavend, the majestic peak rising in solitary, barren grandeur so high above the others that often its covering of snow seemed like a white veil far above darker shoulders of the slopes beneath it.

One day Esmat had noted the all-enveloping snow extending down over the Shimran area. She knew the Neaveran property, still not without its problems even though it was rented regularly each summer, would be covered with snow in all its narrow lanes, on all its stony fields, on the honeysuckle and rosebushes in the garden. As she looked toward the mountains, her eyes rested on the spot where she knew Qasr Kajar, the penitentiary, must be. How many snows had fallen! How many winters had dragged slowly by! *The young sapling he ordered planted near the water cistern when we first came from Kashan is taller than I am,* she thought wearily. *Next year Ali Naqi will enter school. He was wearing a plaster cast when Ali left us.*

How slow were the heavy feet of time! Like the camel's pace when morning saw him wearily entering a caravansary! Like that tired animal, she too had felt the burden of the years — the lawyer's fees, the children's clothes, the house rent, the daily food — even with the constant help from the Motavali and the Mujtahid, these were a heavy burden. How long must she carry it alone?

She sighed as she recalled the fortuneteller's prophecy: seven years of bad luck! For the first time a dark cloud of doubt settled over her, " What can I do that I have not done? " she asked herself. " Many, many times I have fed the poor in or-

der that they might bless us and change our bad fortune to good; I have given gifts to beggars, hundreds of tomans in these long years; prayers I have offered according to Moslem rituals; I have cut the Koran always before every important decision; yet Ali remains in prison. What have I not done? What, oh, what, can I do? "

She wrung her hands and flung them up to grasp each side of her head. She shook it from side to side in her anguish as she moaned: " O God! O God! Show me the way and what I must do next! "

Naneh came up from the lower rooms as she heard her mistress moan and tried to soothe her. " Now, don't worry. All will be well. Listen to the dream I had last night — "

Esmat clung to her woman, sobbing. " I've tried so hard — but still he is in prison — " She checked herself: " Your dream — tell me your dream." She began to laugh hysterically. " You always have such funny dreams! "

Her woman was not offended. " This time it was the strangest dream I ever had. Do you remember the Christian nurse who took care of Ali Naqi so long? He loved her; but I hated her. She was so particular about his bed, his food, his sleep, and his — everything. Do you remember her? "

" Of course, how could one forget her? But your dream, what was your dream? "

" That nurse walked in my dreams last night! She was in her white uniform in the garden, and she opened the door for someone; she beckoned for someone to enter; I could not see him, but I knew it was Colonel Ali."

Esmat listened with widening eyes. " The Christian nurse opened this door! " she repeated. She turned her eyes from her old nurse and stared openmouthed at the garden door overhung now with dry ivy vines.

" Yes, it was this door," said Naneh, nodding her head as she too stared at the familiar door. " But it was only a dream! "

" But that is one thing I have not done! " said Esmat suddenly.

" What are you talking about? " asked her puzzled woman.

" Your dream and the Christians! What day is this? "

" Sunday," answered Naneh. " What difference does that make? "

" Is it really Sunday? Have we candles? Tell me quick, have we candles? "

Naneh looked alarmed. " Have you gone crazy? Candles? Yes, we have, though what you can want them for — "

Esmat seized her arm. " Quick! Get the candles! Come with me! Let us try the Christian way! Let us light the candles and pray for Ali! "

In vain Naneh tried to dissuade her mistress. Esmat would not relinquish her idea. In the end they left the garden and walked rapidly up Shahabad to the avenue, where once they had noticed groups of people coming from the mission church. It was still early in the morning when they entered the mission garden.

" Where is the house of God? " asked Esmat of the gatekeeper.

He pointed to the building directly in front of them.

" May we go in? " she asked him next.

" It is open," he replied, and tried to tell her that the services would begin in an hour. But Esmat had started down the path while he was still speaking, calling out to her woman, " Come with me, and hurry!"

Naneh rebelled. " You go — you go alone. I'll not make myself unclean by entering their holy place." She pulled herself away from Esmat. " Here, take the candles. I'll wait for you here."

Esmat did not have time to argue. " Wait, then. I'll be back soon."

She walked quickly to the church and opened the door. No one was in the big, empty room. Her attention immediately was drawn to the simple walnut cross and a pair of walnut candleholders, each with a white candle, which stood on a table under the arched window. The cross seemed to draw her toward the railed-in chancel. She knelt on the step before it, unwrapped her candles, struck a match and lighted them, affixing them with a drop of wax to the floor bricks in front of the chancel rail.

Then she bowed her head, touching the bricks between the candles with her forehead as she was wont to touch her Moslem seal, and whispered her prayer: " God of the Christians! You made Ali Naqi well. Set my husband free, I beg of you, God of the Christians. I have done everything I can. You are my last hope. Set my Ali free, God of the Christians."

With closed eyes, she raised and lowered her head again and again, touching her forehead to the hard bricks each time as she prayed the same prayer over and over again, as she had been taught to say her Arabic prayers.

A gentle hand touched her shoulder. She opened her eyes to see a strange man standing by her side. He spoke to her in a soft voice. " What are you doing? Why did you light these candles? "

" Was it wrong? The candles are mine. I was praying — my husband is in trouble — "

The man smiled. " Prayers do not need candlelight to find their way to our Father in heaven. Jesus Christ said, ' Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' "

Esmat, still kneeling, stared at the speaker for a minute, then stumbled to her feet and fled through the open door.

Naneh came to her eagerly. " Did he put you out? Did you pray? Where are the candles? "

But Esmat, distraught at her daring deed, at the strange words from a foreigner, hurried her toward the gate. They had barely reached it when Shamsi, coming to the Sunday service, entered the garden. She held out both hands in greeting. " Esmat! How nice you have come here! The service has not begun yet; stay with me! "

Naneh spoke up. " The khanum came to light candles and pray for her husband. We are going home now."

Shamsi smiled. " You lighted candles! "

Esmat, her feeling of intrusion vanishing as she saw a familiar face, said: " Yes, I heard that is what Christians do when they pray. A man spoke to me — he said it was not necessary — but I had lighted them already, and I prayed for Ali. We are leaving now."

" Do you know who he was? "

" No," said Esmat. " He had a nice voice and he was polite to me, but I was afraid I had done something wrong."

" There he comes now! I saw him talking to her." Naneh pointed to a gray-haired man who was walking toward a group of men near the back of the church.

" He is the minister; he will preach to us soon. Don't you want to stay and hear him? "

Esmat hesitated, looked at Naneh, saw her motioning her to depart. Feeling contrary, she said to her woman: " You may go home. I want to pray again for Ali; twice brings good luck."

" Well, I won't leave you to come home alone! If you must do it, I'll wait for you at the gate. *Insha Allah,* your prayers will be *qabul* — "

So Naneh turned back to sit on the edge of a chair in the warm little gatehouse where she could watch the crowd, while Shamsi, taking her friend's arm, ushered her to a seat on a long wooden bench where other women were now seated. Esmat, feeling secure with Shamsi near her, looked curiously about the small church. Two lighted tapers now stood on each side of the cross. " He put my candles on the candlesticks near the cross," she whispered to Shamsi.

" Perhaps. They make it look nicer, don't they? But you must not talk — "

Maybe they don't need them, but they use lights for beauty, just as we do, thought Esmat. *How plain the church is, and how simple! Not at all like our mosques.* Now the audience had risen and began to sing. She looked inquiringly at Shamsi. " Why are they singing? " she whispered.

" I'll tell you later. We must be quiet — it is the house of God, you know, *Beit Khoda.*"

Esmat was silent; she knew what *Beit Khoda* meant — the dwelling place of God. Her thoughts raced on: *How curious it all is! Yet how simple — no kneeling or special rituals — you just talk to God where you are!* As the minister began his sermon, she found her interest captured by the tale he was telling and listened closely until the end. He spoke of prayer and its answers, as Jesus had taught his disciples, as Christians

had learned through the years since Christ came.

As they left the church, Esmat was still silent. When Naneh rushed up, insisting they must hurry home, she said good-by to her friend and promised to see her soon.

At home Naneh said to her: "Let us go to the bath! We might be *najjess,* unclean, by having gone to that place."

"It was their holy place, it is true, but it is not unclean, even though it is a Christian church. Still, I'll go to the bath if you want to," Esmat replied.

Naneh maintained it was wisdom to observe proper precautions, and excused herself by saying, "I'll not have that nurse telling me I'm not clean enough to open that door if she comes and haunts me again tonight." She shook her head superstitiously. "God forbid that she appear again! It portends no good when Christians walk in a Moslem's dreams."

The military court had been busy spasmodically with the dossier of Colonel Ali Kashani for four years. The charges against him, neglect of duty and bribery in office, were known when Ali was first imprisoned; the question was not whether he was guilty but how far his guilt extended. There was no need to hurry! It would please His Majesty more if the examination as it proceeded uncovered the full extent of his prisoner's malfeasance in office. The files must be perfect and complete, incontrovertible evidence of the colonel's guilt or innocence.

Detectives from the Government secret service questioned the military chauffeur who knew a good deal about Colonel Ali's out-of-town visits and uncovered many important facts that showed flagrant offenses against the laws of the country. Malfeasance in office was a serious matter. Investigators were sent to the tribal regions to prove the charges. They were allowed plenty of time for their work. Who could know — perhaps in addition to accepting bribes Ali had been instrumental in the rebellion among the tribes that threatened to displace Riza Shah Pahlavi.

Had it not been for the lawyer Esmat engaged, the case would have moved much more slowly than it did. For when

they could not implicate Ali in the rebellion the courts seemed to lose interest in his affairs. Time and again Esmat sent her lawyer to remind the judge of Ali.

No one but Esmat seemed to care whether he languished in jail or walked the streets of the city; no one but Esmat even remembered him now. Why hurry the courts? What is a year or two of delay, or even three or four years' consideration of a case, in the weaving of the pattern of life on the loom of Iran?

In Europe war shook its mailed fist at England, arousing the British to defend their homeland. National greed in other lands reached out like the tentacles of an octopus: east, west, north, and south they stretched, and whatever land each tip touched, the sting of its poison devitalized it. Perhaps the unrest of the world had its repercussion in the military life of Iran, for it became evident that conditions abroad brought a loosening of the pressure within.

Or was it possible that His Majesty, the Shah-in-Shah, regretted the severity of some of his punishments? Why else did he begin to review the files of his royal prisoners in Qasr Kajar?

On the tenth of Bahman, January 30, Esmat was notified by a written communication borne by a messenger that the judge of the military court wanted her lawyer and one of the family of the prisoner to appear in his judicial chambers the following day. Esmat could not sleep that night. Her long vigil was nearing its end. What would be the verdict? Freedom or death for Ali?

When morning came, she sent for her father's friend, the Ostad of Literature at the University, and requested him to go with her, the lawyer, and Naneh. When they reached the military headquarters, the usual delays occurred. It was nearing noon before the Kashan lawyer and the learned man were finally ushered into the judge's presence.

Esmat and Naneh sat silently awaiting their return. Esmat's sleepless night had made her pale and taut. She twisted her handkerchief into a knot, then balled it into her tightly closed hand; her eyes were black, with their distended pupils staring at the door where the men had entered. The burdens of the

years seemed to weigh her down like an anchor, and she felt heavy with weariness and worry and quite alone with her troubles. She had felt that way once before: when she had gone to the Christian church. What was it the strange man had said to her? " Come unto me you who are tired and weary, I will help you."

Who could that man have meant by " me "? God? Allah, of course; everyone in trouble goes to Allah for help. Who leads us to God? The prophets: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed. What can be the power in the church of the Christians that led me there that day? Was it by that same power that the Christians pray and heal their sick? Can it be that that prayer will be answered today?

She turned to Naneh. " It was a holy place. I spoke to God. I was in distress and he heard me. Ali will be set free today."

" Of course," said her woman soothingly. " You lighted the candles. He will be released."

" No, the candles did not do it; my prayer did; I am certain it will be answered. But whatever will Ali do now? If he was guilty, he can't enter the army again. What will he do with himself? I prayed for his freedom, I worked for it, but what will the future hold for him? and for me? "

The door of the courtroom opened and the two men reappeared. They were smiling, and the lawyer was holding a document in his outstretched hand.

" He is free! " cried Esmat, rising.

" Yes," said her lawyer. " Here is his discharge. He can leave some day next week."

" Naturally he was fined. The property on Avenue Pahlavi was confiscated to pay for that," said the Ostad.

" What do I care about that! Thank God, Ali is to be released! " Esmat was trembling with nervous excitement. " Tell me what the judge said."

The lawyer reported that His Majesty had personally asked about the prisoners in Qasr Kajar. The courts had furnished the papers and Colonel Ali's dossier was among those referred to the shah. The judge said the shah had declared that Ali was guilty, but that four years' imprisonment had been sufficient

punishment. The courts were confiscating the property to pay the costs of the trial and the fine for the taking of bribes. The case was ended.

" Thank God! Thank God! Let us go home and get ready for him."

They left the building together, but when they reached the street the lawyer begged to be excused. " You do not need my services any longer; your man can take the papers of release to the penitentiary and your husband will be permitted to leave." He handed the papers to Esmat, then bowed to her with his hand held flat against his chest. " I wish to say this: You have been a very wise woman. Without your persistence, your wisdom, your help, Colonel Ali Kashani would have been dead long ago."

" You are right," said the Ostad. " She has been a wise woman; so many wives are so foolish under such circumstances."

The two men complimented her further, then bade her farewell, but Esmat scarcely heard them, for their words had started the familiar echo of her subconscious:

" Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down . . ."

" They called me a ' wise woman,' " she said in surprise to Naneh as the men left them. " Did you hear them? " She shook her head superstitiously as she added: " But it was not my wisdom — it was the prayer in the Christians' church that did it; I know it was. But I am a Moslem, and Ali is a Moslem, and our children must be Moslems. I am afraid I did wrong that day! "

" Oh, no! You made no mistake," said Naneh. " It was his kismet to be freed at this time."

Esmat sent Ahmad to the prison with Ali's food and the papers. That evening he reported that he had seen Colonel Ali, who had asked for his old suit of civilian clothes and a pair of dark glasses because his eyes were troubling him. Ahmad added that Ali's eyes seemed red and inflamed. " Conjunctivitis or trachoma," speculated Esmat. " The Government prisons are

full of eye trouble. It is good he is coming home soon. The doctors can cure those diseases easily."

That night she lay awake a long time. The words she had sought to avoid echoed again in her mind: " Every wise woman . . . the foolish one . . ."

" My baby! My little boy! " she cried in her heart.

Like balm for her wounds came the thought: *Ali is coming home; perhaps I will have another baby!*

Sleep claimed her quickly after that, for all the night sounds sang the same happy song: " Ali, my beloved, my husband, is coming home to me! "

CHAPTER 21

DURING THE LONG HOURS OF THE DAY ALI WAS TO BE BROUGHT home, Esmat tried to anticipate his arrival. She pictured him subdued, gentle, humbly needing her help, dependent on her graciously bestowed ministrations; she saw herself an angel of comfort, putting soothing drops in his eyes, helping him in his weakness.

She prepared everything that she might need and posted the excited children at various points to warn her of Ali's approach. Finally Effat and the maidservant Talaat, who were at the entrance of the lane, caught sight of a car, with Ahmad beside the driver directing him how to make the difficult turn into their narrow lane. " He has come! He has come! " they cried, running back to the garden.

Parvin and Ali Naqi jumped up and down screaming joyously: " He has come! He has come! "

Naneh, standing near the open door, peered into the lane before she too called out: " Yes, it is true! *Alhambdo l'Illah!* He is here! "

Esmat had tried to maintain her dignity, lest something occur at the last moment that would disappoint them all, but now she cast it aside as she hurried down the steps to meet her husband, and to greet him in a voice choked with feeling. " Thank God you have come! *Khoda shokr!* " she stretched out her arms toward him.

Ali, striding independently up the walk, took her hands in his, leaned over and kissed them in the customary manner. " My kismet has been kind to let me return to you," he said.

That is what he always said when he had been away from me, Esmat thought. But aloud she said: " How are your eyes, Ali? Are they very painful? I have a drug ready, if you wish,

I will drop some under the lids."

Ali raised his hand to adjust his dark glasses. "It is nothing serious, just a little conjunctivitis. I do not want any drops. I want to see the children." He sat down on the porch in the sunshine.

But Esmat was not to be put off. "Let me get the medicine. I had Naneh go to the Christian hospital for it when I knew you were coming home today."

"*Vilash kon!* Let my eyes alone! I only want to sit in the sun and talk to the children." Ali beckoned to the three youngsters who were staring up at him from the bottom step. "Come here, Ali Naqi! Let me see you!" Ali Naqi pulled at his sister's hand, and the two went up the steps to stand before their father.

"How you have grown! I would never have known you — only there is a look of your grandfather's in those eyes of yours. Haven't you got a new suit?"

His son nodded. "Where did you get it? from the bazaar?"

This time Ali Naqi's tongue was loosened. "No, the dressmaker made it. It's nicer than the bazaar ones — they don't have pockets." Proudly he exhibited the pockets.

But his father growled: "No woman can make a boy's clothes decently. Even a bazaar suit has better lines. A man's tailor is the best." He turned to Esmat. "Why did you not have a tailor make it?"

As he talked to the children, Esmat had been studying her husband. *He is pale, but not very thin,* she thought; *my bribes must have brought him the food we sent, praise God.* Then she heard him ask about the tailor. Did he not realize how she had to economize all these years? She stammered: "They are so very expensive — he is only a little boy yet — perhaps you forgot — money —"

His exasperated reply silenced her. "*Bashad!* Let it be!" he said, and turned from her to the girls. "Parvin! Can you read yet?"

Parvin was delighted that he noticed her. "I have finished the second book," she said proudly.

Lest she be omitted, Effat spoke up quickly: "I am in the

14930

fourth book. And Ali Naqi can read his *Aliph-bi.*"

" Go get your book. Let me see if you really can read your alphabet," Ali said to his son.

" I'll get mine too," cried Effat and Parvin together, and all three raced off.

Esmat rose too. " Ali, do let me get that eye medicine," she said. " You know the doctors always say you should treat such things as soon as possible."

Her husband's tone was crisply severe as he said: " I won't have you dropping medicine in my eyes. If I think I need help I will go to the doctor. Until then you are to leave me alone."

Esmat said nothing. *Those glasses,* she thought, *they annoy me. I can't see his expression. But he is tired; I must not make him angry.*

When the children returned, Ali looked at their books, asked them a question or two, then said: " You seem to have learned a great deal! Tomorrow I'll take you for a ride in the automobile since you have studied so hard! "

Effat looked quickly at her mother, but Parvin and Ali Naqi cried out: " We haven't any automobile any more. Mother sold it! "

" You sold the car! My car! What right had you to sell it? " Anger flamed in his face. He rose to his feet, took a step toward his wife, raised his arm as if to strike her. Then he saw Naneh watching him curiously and he let his arm drop. " Answer me. Why did you sell my car? "

Esmat recoiled involuntarily; she looked at the staring children as she said: " We needed money. We did not need an automobile while you were away, so I sold it."

" But how could you? It was mine, I tell you! " Ali still stood over her, furor etched in very line of his face.

Drawing a deep breath which seemed to give her new courage, Esmat looked at him as she spoke in a tone so low the servants could not hear: " It was not easy; but I convinced the lawyer, and he and I persuaded the judge and the garage owner that since I was your legal wife the car was mine also. We were fortunate it was not confiscated by the Government like the other house and its furnishings."

As Ali listened to her quiet explanation, his momentary anger cooled, but a resentment took its place, a resentment that his child wife from Kashan had been able to do a thing which even a man would have trouble in accomplishing, a resentment that she should have known about his affair with Afsar. For how else could she have known about the Pahlavi house being confiscated?

Esmat noted how nervous he was, how he turned the cigarette over and over in his hands. " My father said it was a good deal I made. You know he was the only one of the families who dared to come to see me. He helped me so much — "

She paused, for he had turned away and walked over to his son, who was repeating the alphabet over and over in a monotonous chant. Ignoring his wife and daughters, he questioned the boy again about his lessons. Then he told Ali Naqi to fetch his writing materials, so that he might observe how he walked. But he did not speak to Esmat or compliment her on his son's healthy appearance and posture; he studied him silently as the boy ran after his pen and paper.

Esmat looked more closely at her husband. She saw the deep, bitter lines in his face, the mouth drawn tight and tense. She scarcely dared speak to him, but she did not want the servants to notice anything, so she said: " The American doctors say Ali Naqi is quite well again and there is no need to worry about his trouble ever returning. Did you notice how straight he stands now? Just like you! "

" Yes; his leg is quite as it should be." But Ali showed no inclination to continue the conversation; he turned his face away from his wife instead. Then Esmat noticed the hair on his temple. She spoke quickly, involuntarily: " Ali! You turned gray in prison! Did you worry about us? "

" About you? Why should I worry about you? or your children? The family would care for you someway." He rubbed his temple, added, " There is no more gray there than a little henna will cure quickly." He frowned with annoyance.

Esmat regretted her words. " You are right, it is nothing. And you will want to go to the bath now. Shall I have Naneh get your things ready? "

Again Ali was angry. " Not that woman! That corner-snooping, sneaking female! Let my man do it for me."

Esmat answered him slowly, cautiously, for she realized Ali had forgotten that he was no longer a colonel, with underlings doing his bidding. " We have no men but the gardener and Ahmad, your father's nazir."

He made a nervous motion of annoyance as the realization of his changed position struck him. No servants to order about! His choler rose; it increased his resentment against his wife, and spread to her woman as well. " Let Ahmad get my things and accompany me."

" He isn't a servant! He is an overseer! He might not do it," warned Esmat. Nevertheless, she rose and talked quietly to Naneh a moment.

The desultory, aimless conversation ended at last when Ahmad arrived with a small bundle of bath accessories and the two men left together, Ahmad reluctantly taking the place of a personal servant, Ali resentful, seeking to cover his embarrassment in his quick, forceful stride.

Esmat, alone with her children and servants, felt numb with hurt. What could she do now? What would he ask for next? *Perhaps he will prefer to sleep in his study in the men's room,* she thought, sighing despairingly as she considered what that would mean. For now her fear was that he might not want her. Her dead baby, Afsar, the long years of imprisonment stood between them.

" Come here, Naneh! " she called. " Bring some bedding for the couch in the men's room. It may be better for Ali to sleep there. I don't think he is well — maybe his eyes are paining him."

And Naneh agreed that it was a good plan.

It was late when the two men returned. Usually Ali sat quietly, after a bath, resting and smoking, but tonight he came into the room where Esmat was and asked her abruptly: " Where are my papers? You must have got into my secret drawers in my desk or you could never have found the car ownership certificates."

" Your personal papers? Yes, Ahmad and I went through

them several times, but we always put them back where we found them. They are in your desk." Esmat was anxious to placate him. " Let me help you." She rose to go with him.

But he brushed her aside almost rudely. " I'll find them myself. I don't want you bothering me."

As he left Naneh came in. " What did he want? Men are always asking for things women put away."

" It was nothing, just some papers. Be sure the cook has a good supper. He must be very hungry after all this excitement. Perhaps I had better go down and see to it myself."

In the kitchen, seeing that the special meal she had ordered was as perfectly prepared as possible, Esmat tried not to let her thoughts wander too much to Ali, sitting in his study. He would find the Neaveran papers, the rental contracts and all. She had wanted to explain them to him, but he did not want her with him; he did not want sympathy from anyone. She said to the cook, " See that the rice isn't too greasy," but she thought, *He won't know what he is eating tonight.*

When the steaming food was on the table, she called Ali Naqi. " Go to your father; tell him supper is ready. He will stop his work and come with you, so run along quickly."

Her approach had been the correct one, for Ali, with his little son holding his hand, soon entered the dining room. He spoke spasmodically to the children, who still eyed him with awe. He noticed, however, that the meat sauce for the rice pilau was his favorite one, with lentils and sour greens and tender meat, and sent word by Naneh to the cook that it was very well prepared. Still it was an unnatural meal, stilted and formal, for a stranger sat in their midst, a man who made no effort to be more than ordinarily polite, who swallowed his food hurriedly and seemed impatient at their leisurely manners.

In the midst of it all, a villager arrived with produce that Esmat had ordered brought from Neaveran. The gardener, who knew that his mistress liked to see what was brought as soon as it arrived, ushered him onto the porch and summoned Esmat. She rose, stood in the doorway, and inspected his load, complimenting him on each article. Then she directed Naneh, and Fati the cook, to take away his burden and bring him tea and

a plateful of food.

While this was being done, she questioned him about affairs in the village. Had the spring plowing been done? Had the new wheat begun to sprout? Was it free from mustard seeds?

Ali, sitting with the children, listened in surprise. For he heard her quick questions, saw her decisive ways, noted her assurance in dealing with the man. *She is different,* he thought. *She is dictating to him, yet he shows by his manner that he respects her. When did she learn it all?* He thought back to the night of the abortion, the night he had left her in such anger because he could not foresee what effect her act would have on his military career if the shah learned that she had done it purposely.

Yet because she was the first person who had successfully defied him — for he had ordered her to go to the reception and she had not gone — to him she stood for all the misfortunes that had culminated in his long imprisonment. He resented her progress, her development — he could not bear to look at her just now. He said to his son: " I must go back to my desk. Tell your mother I have finished my meal."

Later that evening Esmat heard the garden door slam and realized that Ali had left them. *Where can he have gone? Whom is he going to see at this hour?* she wondered, but she calmed her fears by telling herself: " He will only walk up and down Istambul and Lalehzar in the crowds. No one will recognize him, but it will seem like heaven to him after all these long years."

So she sent the children to bed, and sat down to await his return. The hours dragged slowly by, marked by the far-distant striking of the British Embassy clock. Did he not understand how lonely she had been? how she had longed for him, ached for him, loved him, and helped him in every way she could?

The clock had struck one before she heard the knocker bang on the garden door, heard the gardener sleepily shambling across the yard, heard Ali's quick step, saw his dark form crossing the garden, coming — coming up the steps to the porch. Would he stop at her door? Her heart pounded, it skipped a beat, raced onward as she saw him enter the room. " O Ali, my

beloved, you have come at last! " she whispered, as he leaned over to see whether she were awake.

The distant clock struck twice in the still night. Esmat lay alone. *He has changed — he has changed,* she thought. *I was not his wife. I was only a woman. He has left me alone here. There is a wall between us — a barrier reaching back through the years — will it stretch on into the future? Why did he leave me? Why?*

The night did not answer her question, and Ali, settling down in the *birooni,* had not felt called to do so. Esmat, his wife, was his to do as he wished with — if he wanted to leave her, why should he stay? What woman was worth worrying over when the world contained so many? What if she had changed, if now she was efficient and capable? He would prove that he was still a man among men and could have any woman he wanted.

The next day Ali, saying nothing to Esmat of his purposes, went to the bank where he had kept his money. What ignominy he suffered at the hands of the clerks he never divulged, but he learned that he no longer had any funds there; they had all been confiscated. He decided to telegraph his father and, while he waited for a reply, he went to call on his former lieutenant, Parviz Jangju.

To his surprise he heard this family extol his wife's praises. They made it clear to him that although everyone had daily expected his execution, Esmat alone had never given up hope; it was she who had saved his life. Ali's resentment turned into animosity as he heard these friends imply that he was alive today only because of Esmat and her untiring devotion. He left early, though they pressed him to stay for supper, and at home he ordered his meal served in the study alone.

The next day he demanded that Esmat tell him what price had been paid for the car. Her answer infuriated him. The car had cost him twice that in the beginning, he declared; anyone knew that these days cars were worth many times their purchase price. Why had it been sold at all? He would be a rich man if Esmat had not disposed of it. He brushed aside her an-

swers as illogical, childish, and unreasonable. His father had money — her father too. It was his car; she had had no right to sell it.

Nor was he pacified when he learned through Ahmad of the management of the Neaveran property. It had already been leased for the second year to the family who had occupied it the previous season. Ali declared the rental figure was ridiculously low and informed Ahmad that he intended to sell it at once. He needed money.

When the nazir reminded him of the rental contract, he laughed disdainfully. "Let the new landlord take care of that!"

When Esmat learned of his decision, she was greatly disturbed. She sent word that she had just paid heavy winter repair bills; let Ali continue to manage it this season at least. It was bad business to sell it just now. The go-between, Ahmad, reported her remarks to her husband, who burst into a fit of sarcastic laughter. "Does a woman think to advise me? Me? Bah! Women know nothing of such affairs."

The property was sold within the first week of his return.

Esmat never knew the price, for, although Ahmad had accompanied Ali and the prospective buyer, the deal was completed when Ahmad was not present and all he could tell her was that the money had been deposited in the Bank Mellie. It was disconcerting to be ignored once more, to have the reins of her household rudely snatched from her hands, to have every command she gave questioned. She had exalted Ali to her children, and through the years had pictured him in her own mind as a man above others; she had forced from her mind his lapse of fidelity with Afsar; she was willing to begin a new life upon his return from prison. But she had not considered that such a life would mean sacrificing herself and her own liberty. Now even the servants, who had given her such quick obedience, hesitated to obey her commands, asking instead whether the master, the aga, wanted it thus or so before they complied with her orders.

In her wildest dreams Esmat had not imagined that her husband would be more irascible than he had been before he

deserted her for Afsar. It seemed as though all the torrents of abuse and ignominy that he had suffered had found a volcanic outlet at last, and wife and children and servants were made to suffer as he had suffered throughout his long imprisonment.

Especially provoking were Ali's dark glasses. " They are like a wall about his thoughts," Esmat said to Naneh one day. " I hate them."

When the Motavali learned of his son's release, he telegraphed him to return to Kashan for a visit. Ali said nothing to Esmat of this message until he strode into the *anderun* one morning and announced that the following week they would leave for Kashan.

" You will go with Ahmad, of course," said his wife.

" By the prophets! " cried Ali. " Are you deaf that you do not understand? We are all going! Get ready."

Esmat looked to see if his black eyes were sparkling as they always had done when he was excited, but her glance could not penetrate the dark glasses.

Ali turned away and she stared at his back unbelievingly. " You mean Talaat, Fati, Naneh, the children, and I must go too? "

" Stop your talking and get busy! " he snapped.

" But why should we? The children are in school and we are happy here."

" Who do you think you are that I should keep an establishment for you in the capital city? " sneered Ali. " You belong in Kashan; you should never have left there."

Esmat recoiled as if he had hit her. " You say that! You! Who fed you and took care of your business these four years? In the name of God, it was I, and I alone! Who got you out of prison? " In her fury she sprang to her feet and faced him. " You would be there yet — or dead, if I had not helped you! "

Rudely Ali pushed her aside, and his reply was like the sting of an angry hornet: " Don't you know it was all your fault that I was sent to jail? You would not go to the shah's reception with me. I was never able to regain his favor from that day on! "

She stood where he had shoved her, back to the wall, slender,

taut fingers outspread, gripping its flat surface as his pent-up anger swept over her like a flood. She gasped as it inundated her and sought to grasp some straw of reality.

"I! I! Your wife who always adored you! Who was so proud of you! Can you believe I was the cause of your misfortune?"

"I not only believe it; I know it!" cried Ali furiously as he strode from the room. He turned in the doorway. "Know this: we shall leave for Kashan in a week. See that you are ready! As far as I am concerned, you will remain there forever."

The rug in the doorway fell into position as he passed into the hall. Esmat stared unseeingly at its pattern, the Tree of Life design she had woven, then she sank onto the couch.

Her childhood home again! Kashan! Always Kashan! Never anywhere else but Kashan! A vision rose before her like a nightmare. Through the alkali plains stretching between Teheran and her birthplace she saw it rise: a city of disintegrating mud walls, of streets filled with holes full of dust, high winds carrying the dust everywhere, everything enveloped by dust. A noisy, dirty room for her children's school, and a stern priest of Islam, with his rod over his knee, for their teacher, or a private tutor in their own home droning away on the suras of the Arabic Koran. Scorpions dropping from the curtains of her bedroom, tarantulas crawling on their bed nets at night! Until she came to Teheran these had been part of her life, but suddenly she realized that one need not endure them. One need not live in Kashan.

Yet where could they live? What could they do with no work for Ali? His family had given them so much money during the past four years that they could not be asked to do more. Or if they did help them until Ali found work, expenses would be much less in Kashan. Surely they should return for a little while anyway. The girls, her son, were only in the primary classes; it did not matter so much where they studied now.

When she reached her decision, she flung herself on the couch and wept as she had not since the time of her lonely abortion. A wife had to obey her husband; he had the power over her will and her body — did not the Koran say so? And

in Kashan perhaps she could find something to do; women worked in Teheran. As she thought of her duties, she grew quiet, stopped weeping, conceived a new plan for the future.

Naneh, listening at the closed door, whispered into the silence: " Khanum! Dear lady! Kashan is not so bad! Do nothing foolish! "

Esmat sat erect, staring at the keyhole as the echo of the past resounded in her heart. Those words again! Would they always haunt her?

Over and over they rang in her throbbing, hurt consciousness. At length she called to her woman, who eyed her red eyes with concern. " Tell the aga I wish to see him," she said.

" He has gone out," Naneh replied. " I heard him leave."

" Well, then, leave word for him to come to me when he returns." She rose calmly and seated herself and began writing.

Naneh, mystified by her silence, stood watching her a few moments, then asked if she should begin packing.

" No," said her mistress. " Wait until I have seen the aga."

It was late before Ali returned. He ignored her request for his presence in the *anderun;* instead he went to bed.

In the morning Esmat went herself to his rooms. Timidly she knocked at the door; when she heard his growling command, she opened the door and walked in. He was seated at the desk where she and Ahmad had found his papers of value and he did not look up until she had crossed the room.

He scowled at her with displeasure. " You! What do you want? I told you to pack for Kashan! "

She stood meekly before him, waiting for his anger to subside, her eyes on the floor. After a moment's silence, she spoke softly. " I have thought of a plan by which you need not take us with you. Women with education can get work in Teheran; my father's friend in the university once suggested a job for me. You can leave the children with me, I will provide for them here."

Ali jumped to his feet, grabbed her by one arm, and pushed her back to the door and out into the hall. " You work! " he roared. " You earn money! You fool, what can you do? Get out of here and get busy as I told you to or — " he choked

with his rage, continued — " or I will kill you. I tell you I will kill you if you don't obey me! "

Ahmad, coming up the steps as Esmat fled before her husband's wrath, heard Ali's order and his threat. His eyes showed concern and pity for her, for he had learned in the past four years that she was a capable woman. Was this the way to treat her?

But Esmat did not see him or hear him. She heard only the angry words of her husband: " Kill you — you fool! " Her horror at Ali's rebuff, her fear of his threat, constricted her throat so that she could scarcely speak to Naneh, who must have overheard the scene, for she was waiting near the garden door.

" We will pack for Kashan," Esmat said raspingly.

" Yes, yes, that is the wise thing to do," said Naneh.

" Wise — foolish; you fool, I will kill you! " Was she wise or was she a fool? Who could tell her the answer? How was she to know what was wisdom, what was foolishness? There was only one thing now to do: obey her husband as the Koran had taught her — lest he kill her as he threatened to do.

Some other time she would think it through. Now she feverishly packed for Kashan.

CHAPTER 22

THE FAMILY REACHED KASHAN EARLY IN MARCH. THEY WENT at once to the Motavali's home, where Ali tramped restlessly through the gardens of his boyhood for four days, shunning all who came to see him. The visitors were all friends of his father's; none of the young men he had known had remained in Kashan, it seemed. Military conscription or officers' training school had absorbed them, and after tasting the delights of the modern capital few desired to return to Kashan.

That was the trouble with his birthplace; no one wanted to stay there, not even Esmat. As he thought of his wife and her quiet obedience to his angry orders, Ali experienced a strange sensation — a sympathy for and a slight understanding of her reluctance to obey his commands. She was young too, younger than he — why should she want to live in Kashan? But he rejected the thought of letting her return to Teheran to try for the job she had mentioned or of leaving their children with the grandparents and both of them returning to try to change their luck together. " She is just a woman, let her stay here. It is right and proper that she care for my children. I don't want her about; she would hamper me," he said to himself peevishly.

The fifth day Ali followed the familiar path to his father's private room, facing the courtyard of the Mosque. Memory took him back to the day his father had informed him there of his failure in his religious examination, which had resulted in his laying aside his inherited turban and sash of Islam. He felt again the ignominy that had irritated him then, that had clothed him as his civilian attire had — in disgrace. Never once in the intervening years and the hurried visits to Kashan, when he had been so proud of his military rank, had he found time to go to his father's study. What a strange fate it was that made

him return clothed in civilian clothes again, and again covered by disgrace!

Now as he looked at his parent slowly laying aside his reed pen as his son entered, he saw him clearly for the first time since his return. The hennaed beard was longer than it used to be, the eyebrows shaggier and hennaed also to cover their grayness, the close-shaven head seemed oddly shiny where the heavy turban had been pushed back; but the penetrating look the Motavali gave his son was as keen as it ever had been.

" Come in! Do be seated! " He politely gestured to the place opposite the door, and continued, " But perhaps you have forgotten how to gather up your legs beneath you and would prefer the chair? " The older man smiled in greeting.

Ali ignored the chair, dropped gracefully to his knees, then sat back on his heels near the door. He answered his father's smile with a frown and sat puffing his cigarette for a few minutes before he spoke.

" There is nothing to do in this place. I'll go crazy if I have to stay here." He took off his glasses and began cleaning them with his handkerchief.

" You speak truly," said his father. " Unless you care to direct rug-weaving, or teach the young, or make attar of roses, there is little to interest you in this city. Yet it must be better than the shah's penitentiary," he added.

" Prisons are not so bad," replied Ali. " The food the family sent usually reached me. The company was the best; many of the distinguished leaders of Iran were there! There was plenty of excitement too, for we never knew who would join us — or who would leave us forever. If it had not had the name of Qasr Kajar — and we had been certain of our release someday — it would not have been at all bad."

The father smiled slowly at his son's appraisal of the four years' incarceration. " You were fortunate in your wife, my son. Few women would have kept sending you food so long; and your lawyer gives her the credit for your release. Did you know that? "

Ali twisted his lips scornfully. " Bah! What could a woman have done to release me? It was only justice, and my due after

all."

The old man shook his head. "Your wife has been careful in the absence of her husband, as the Koran bids woman to be." He added, "Your eyes are not good; you got that infection in prison?"

"Oh, yes, of course. But anyone may get inflammation in Iran. It is nothing." He rubbed his eyes, scowled once more. "It does not seem to be getting better."

The Motavali leaned closer and peered into his son's face. "They are red and sore. Why don't you consult a doctor here? You'll not want to read or write much." He added. "Esmat would gladly help you by reading for you — "

"No, all women are fools — I don't want to have anything to do with them. I don't want her to read to me; I have no desire for such a life. Your doctors here do more harm than good. I don't trust them at all."

"Esmat is no fool," said his father defensively. "She has shown herself to be quite the opposite. And the doctors have learned much since you were a boy in Kashan."

Ali laid his cigarette down. He changed the subject. "The prophets have said that when a man makes a vow he must fulfill it."

"Every Moslem knows that," replied his father. "What vow did you make?"

"I vowed that if I were released from the prison I would make a pilgrimage to Kerbela and An Najaf, to Mecca if possible."

The Motavali shook his head slowly; he glanced about the courtyard through the window that was open near him and, seeing no one, said to his son in a whisper: "His Majesty personally inspects the names of all who desire to go out of Iran these days. Do you imagine he will permit you to leave?"

Ali shrugged his shoulders. "He need never know."

"How in the name of God will you get a passport?"

Ali opened his coat and removed his wallet from an inner pocket. He opened it and handed a paper to his parent. His father's eyes bulged as he noticed his son's photograph, then saw that the paper was a permit to enter Iraq.

" How did you get this? "

" It is better that you do not know," said Ali. " You are too old and too honest for this generation. But know this — " Ali leaned low and whispered — " not everyone loves the old shah. He has many enemies who need money now and then."

" No good can come from such a pilgrimage," his father prophesied.

" Good! Do you think I want to do good? I want only to fulfill my vow and see a little of the world. Do you think I believe in shrines and holy pilgrimages for the remission of my sins? By Husain and Ali, it is all a lot of nonsense for women and old men! "

The Motavali had endured more than he could bear. He rose to his feet, stood trembling, and pointed to the door with a shaking finger. " Go! " he ordered. " Go and never let me see your face again until you are ready to apologize."

Ali, realizing that he had gone too far, attempted to soothe his irate parent, but the chief of shrine properties would have nothing to do with one who had insulted Islam. Still trembling with just anger, he opened the door for his scowling son.

As the sound of Ali's footsteps died away, the old man sank down upon the rug by the window. His mouth drew into a stern line, his eyes grew hard and dark with the severity of their expression, his entire face changed from that of a gentle priest to that of an unrelenting judge of Islam. He beat his chest with one hand and said aloud: " If he were a Christian, I would kill him; if he were a Bahai claiming another prophet than Mohammed, I would spit upon him, I would disown him; but to have my son a man of no religion, that is the greatest curse of all."

He buried his face in his hands, clenched tightly together upon the manuscripts he had been perusing and which lay on the low table before him.

When Ali realized that he had seriously offended his father, he was distinctly uneasy, for he had counted on his financial aid in the proposed trip to Kerbela and An Najaf. That he might humble himself and beg his father's pardon never oc-

curred to him. Whenever he had been thwarted as a boy, he had always been clever enough to achieve his purpose in some other way. He was sure he could do so now.

The only drawback was the matter of time. He had planned to reach the shrines before the New Year on March 21. It was now almost the first of March. So when he was ordered out of his father's presence, he meditated on this new evidence of bad luck as he crossed the tiled yard, walked through the Sahn into the street, on down this broad avenue in the direction of Fene.

The solution of his problem came to him suddenly as he saw a very old dervish tottering along with his begging bowl. Ali knew well that he was a rich man, one who had planned that sometime before his death he would visit the holy shrines of Islam. All the boys of Kashan knew this fact, and knew also that creeping paralysis and palsy had afflicted him in middle age and that he had never fulfilled his plans. For years he had not dared travel so far lest death meet him on the way.

" By Ali, *ibn Abu Talib,* and all the sainted ones of Islam, I will persuade him to send me as his *nayib ziareh,* his proxy! " declared Ali aloud as he watched the dervish approach.

When Ali went up to him and said, " Salaam aleikum — peace be with you," to the dervish, the shaking old head, eyes downcast to pick out the path among the cobbles, raised, and the old man studied Ali with interest.

Ali's return to the city of his birth had been gossiped about in the bazaar, and Meshdi Hussein, who had visited Meshed and Qum and numerous other sacred Moslem shrines for his health, was well aware that the son of the Motavali had finished his term as a guest of His Majesty, paid his fines, and was now back in Kashan. The dervish's body might be palsied and beyond his control, but his mind was as keen as it ever had been.

He acknowledged Ali's salaam by returning it: " Aleikum Salaam! Well, well, young man! So you've come back to the old town after all! Perhaps you did not enjoy the capital city of Iran so much as you expected."

Was he laughing at him? The old man's head shook so hard

that Ali was not sure, but it made no difference, for from the instant Ali had determined to be Meshdi Hussein's proxy, he affected a change. For months he had been presenting a bitter, cruel face to the world. Yet he remembered his studies of Islam accurately enough to recall that a proxy must be a man whose religion was above question, whose behavior was to all Moslems above reproach. The mistake Ali had made an hour ago could be rectified if he were careful enough in the next few days.

So it was with apparent humility that he replied to the dervish, sighing as he spoke: " Yes, yes. You are right. Teheran is full of evil and it is well to return to the smaller towns where one still finds the true religion."

" You did not always feel that way," replied Meshdi. " How did you come to change? " He chuckled as he tottered slowly to the Moslem drinking fountain by the roadside and seated himself on a stone at its side. " Perhaps a year or two in prison gave you time to think? "

Ali nodded his head slowly. " Many who were imprisoned beside me left this world too suddenly for me not to realize that I too might never live to be old." He sighed again. " And I have never taken even one pilgrimage."

Meshdi Hussein nodded his shaking head. " A great mistake, a great mistake! But you are a young man and you are free now. You can go some day."

" Yes, if it is my kismet, I hope to see all the sacred places very soon. For this eye trouble of mine — " Ali removed his glasses and showed his inflamed eyes to his friend, " these eyes of mine may not last as long as I do."

The old man's head seemed to shake with sympathy while he peered into the red-rimmed eyes. " That is a trial, a real trial," said he. " Thank God I have had my eyes to see the shrines of Iran. Yet I always wanted to go to Kerbela and that I can never do." His shaking head seemed to echo his words, but his shrewd old eyes rested speculatively on the young man standing meekly before him.

Ali replaced his glasses, picked up his cane, and began writing in big Arabic script on the white plaster of the drinking

fountain: " Kerbela, An Najaf, Mecca." He spoke slowly as he wrote. " Did you never think of sending a *nayib ziareh* to say your prayers for you? " He traced the words he had scratched on the wall, saying aloud: " Kerbela, An Najaf, Mecca."

Meshdi Hussein had started to rise, but at the mention of the word " proxy," he sat down again, staring at Ali as steadily as his shaking head would permit. " Yes, yes, often I have considered it, but there was never one in whose piety I believed and in whose integrity I could trust who was young enough for such a journey."

Ali continued to trace over and over the names he had scratched in the plaster while the dervish watched him silently. At length Ali sighed again. " It is strange, here I am a young man, forced to rest my eyes, longing to take the prescribed pilgrimages of our faith, and you, you who have been everywhere but to the holy of holies, you cannot find someone properly qualified to be your proxy."

" Why do you not take these journeys? Perhaps it would cure your eyes." The old man spoke sharply.

" You will pardon me if I speak of my prison experiences. Perhaps you do not know how much money was taken from me there."

" Bribes and fees? Of a certainty you are a poor man now."

" You are correct," sighed Ali. " Not only a poor man, but one that no one will admit being acquainted with, that no one will give work to."

Meshdi Hussein was no fool. " But you are the son of the Motavali of Kashan. He will not let you lack funds."

Ali lied quickly. " Food and shelter he is giving me, but I vowed that if I took the pilgrimages, it would not be with my father's money. You see, I made a vow while I was in prison that should I be released, I would visit the holy of holies of Islam." He turned away sighing. " Perhaps another year it may be possible." He started to walk away.

Meshdi Hussein called him. " Stay! How soon could you be ready? If I made you my proxy, when could you go? Your passport, your visas, how soon could you have them in order? "

Ali turned back slowly. " All is ready now. I can leave as soon as I have the money. But do not raise my hopes in vain. I have had so much trouble and disappointment these four years."

The dervish spoke abruptly. " Show me your papers."

For the second time that afternoon Ali took out his wallet and his passport, with its permission to enter Iraq.

Meshdi Hussein studied it, reading aloud the dates and the places listed, and noting the seals and the signatures. His old eyes showed a new respect as he looked at the young man standing humbly before him. " It is correct. All is in order. You are truly ready for the pilgrimage of this year. Come with me and I will make you my proxy, if the Mujtahid will certify you and if you provide the witnesses needed."

The two went back toward the city, Ali walking slowly to accommodate his pace to that of the trembling old man. But Meshdi Hussein, now that he had determined his course, hurried his steps as though he were decided that death must not prevent the fulfillment of this, his last effort to win peace for his soul in the paradise of Islam. Together they went to the home of Esmat's father.

The sun had barely set before the papers were filled out. The old man promised to bring the necessary funds in the morning, when Ali should have prepared the proper witnesses to his good character, his religious training, and his sincerity of purpose in taking the trip on behalf of the dervish, Meshdi Hussein.

News of the proposed journey spread rapidly through the bazaar. Ali dared not try to suppress it, yet he was afraid it would reach his father's ears and he would come out with the truth against his son. But the fates were on his side, for the Motavali was too preoccupied in getting out a quarterly report of his Shrine's finances to devote further attention to his irreligious son. At one time Meshdi Hussein had been an honored friend of the Motavali, but ever since he had become palsied he had shunned his old friends. Therefore he had not gone to the Motavali to inquire about the newly returned prodigal's religious beliefs.

Instead, he had approached the young Government official, a captain, who was stationed in Kashan for the compulsory recruiting of troops of the area. Ali had spoken to him twice since his return, for Ali had been his superior officer in Teheran. The second time he visited him in his rooms and asked him to vouch for his character to the dervish, leaving a folded bill in his hand as he bid him farewell.

Mahmood Urdu had been in officers' training school at the time of Ali's imprisonment, and he had felt great sympathy for the colonel in his disgrace. He too considered the presence of lice on a soldier a condition impossible to eradicate in Iran, and the taking of a few bribes was nothing to imprison a man for. So now when he found a ten-toman note in his hand, he agreed to Ali's request.

When the dervish sought to verify the reports of Ali's impeccable religious life, Mahmood spun a long tale of how he had often seen his colonel up at dawn, purifying himself for the required prayer ritual; he drew pictures of him beating his chest during the Moharram dramas; added sketches of his gauntness while he carried on his work during the fasting of Ramazan; in fact, proved beyond a doubt that Ali had always faithfully accomplished all that the Koran required of its followers. Then Mahmood further embellished the account by showing how all the long years in prison were but a time of still greater preparation for such a pilgrimage, for had Ali not vowed he would not rest until he had visited the shrines of An Najaf and Kazamain and the graves of the martyrs in the Sahn of Kerbela?

Any doubts remaining in Meshdi Hussein's mind were swept away, and he resolved to finance Ali's journey handsomely. One stipulation only he required. Ali was a seyid. He must wear his seyid's turban and sash when he entered the mosques on behalf of his worthy patron. Ali considered this such a minor request that he readily agreed, assuring himself that a seyid's turban and sash would be an excellent costume for passing the customs officials who might not look too closely at his papers when they saw the sacred green.

He blessed his foresight those last few weeks in Teheran,

when he had decided to purchase a passport no matter what the cost. While he was still a colonel he had heard of the apparently insurmountable difficulties of exit from Iran. At that time he had no desire to leave, but after he had spent four years as the guest of his shah, he determined to prepare himself for departure as soon as he was released. There had been times when he wondered whether the deceptions he had used would escape an official's eye, but when both his father's and Meshdi Hussein's close scrutiny found nothing at fault in his papers, Ali gained confidence in them. Nevertheless, the seyid's sash and turban were a not unwelcome suggestion.

Deciding to see whether his frock coat might not have been put aside by his wife under the direction of his careful mother, Ali sought the women's quarters. Esmat heard him call loudly: " Esmat! Where is my old coat — the one I had before I left for the army? "

How rude he is to me! thought Esmat. She answered him crossly: " What coat do you mean? So many years ago! Before Parvin was born? How should I know? "

" A fine wife you are if you let that coat walk out of the house! " he replied testily.

" Why should I care about a coat when my husband had deserted me? I was dying, I tell you, and you did not care! "

Ali scorned to reply. " Call Naneh," he ordered.

Naneh arrived so promptly that Esmat knew she had been listening, as usual, behind the closed door.

" Get my pleated coat that I used to wear," Ali ordered.

" By my eye! It is here," answered Naneh, as she produced the keys to the big chest in the corner of the room, opened it, and from under piles of discarded clothes dragged out the coat. Ali stood beside the chest looking down at its contents. He hung the coat over his arm and pointed with his cigarette to something within. " Give me that seyid's sash and green-banded turban also," he said.

He left the room without further comment; he did not want spectators for his fitting. Alone in front of the big mirror in the men's reception room he put on the wrinkled old coat and examined himself critically. He had grown thin in prison or

else it would not have done at all, for his shoulders still bore the evidence of military training. When he put on the sash and the turban, they altered his figure so that he seemed even to have become the slouching young man who had lived in Kashan.

As he stared at his reflection, he muttered to himself: " The beard! I must have the beard again! It's a good thing it shows up quickly! Three weeks will give me quite a respectable one! "

He called Ahmad, handed him the coat and sash. " Have these cleaned and in order for me," he commanded.

Esmat could not understand Ali's sudden interest in his clerical attire. If he had failed in the examinations before, he could not pass them now. Yet she was grateful that Naneh had kept them, for it saved her face. Who could say what a man would want, or why, or when? She dismissed the matter from her mind.

But not so with Naneh. Her instinct told her there was something stirring, and it was not long before she was in possession of the facts. Ali was going to An Najaf, Kerbela, and possibly Mecca on behalf of the palsied Meshdi Hussein. Naneh was overjoyed at the news. She had watched Ali grow more dissatisfied and unpleasant daily, and her love for Esmat had grown fiercer and more protective as she observed his indifference and rudeness to her mistress, his quickly flaming anger, his restlessness.

He will come back a true seyid again, she thought.

When she divulged her knowledge, Esmat raised her eyes to heaven, clasped her hands together, and said fervently, " Thank God and Mohammed his Prophet for turning his heart to the true way."

Esmat hesitated, then admitted to Naneh what she had often thought to herself: " You know, I have often worried because of my prayers in the Christian church. I asked that Ali be made free — he was freed. I was given the answer I wanted. But what is freedom without something to do when one is free? He doesn't seem to have any purpose to his life. He doesn't even say his prayers as he used to. He won't listen to me when I remind him of them; he is so nervous and cross."

She stopped. She was seeking excuses for her husband again, but they were old and worn-out in the light of Ali's continued rudeness to her. Nevertheless, she felt she must defend him to her woman. " It is natural too, after four years of imprisonment. There were bad people in there with him, too; he must have talked with them, he must have learned their evil ways. It will take a long time to forget them."

" *Bali,* yes, yes. You are right. And this journey will turn his thoughts to Islam again." Naneh was always ready to comfort her mistress.

So Esmat pretended, like her woman, that there was no doubt that the sight of the revered shrines of Islam would once more make Ali the devoted slave of the Prophet that he had been when she first married him.

The Motavali was surprised when, emerging from his reports, he learned of Ali's position as proxy for Meshdi Hussein, the dervish. He was even more amazed when he heard rumors that he had already departed for Iraq and its holy shrines. He wondered whether the dervish, whom he had not seen for many weeks, could be in full possession of his senses that he had not inquired of Ali's own father concerning his son's spiritual development in the past years. The more he considered the matter, the more certain he became that it was his duty to enlighten the old man and end the farce. For who could believe there was any sincerity of purpose back of Ali's trip? Yet he hesitated to do this as it would reflect on himself and his family.

So he called his nazir Ahmad, and questioned him about the bazaar rumors. Ahmad's replies were vague: Ali had given references; they had been acceptable; Esmat's father had made out the papers. After meditating on the sins of man and of his own son in particular, the Motavali quoted Saadi: " The Most High sees a fault and conceals it; and a neighbor sees it not but shouts. Let us take refuge with Allah! If people knew our faults, no one could have rest from interference by others."

And in the end he said nothing to discredit Ali, for he too hoped that the pilgrimages would have a salutary effect on his

irreligious son.

Time dragged on, moving slowly, laboriously, like the loaded donkeys who carried the new rugs to their washing in the spring waters of Fene. Like them too, it stumbled in pauses of inactivity.

It was now 1942, and strange rumors of political unrest had reached Kashan. Foreign powers eyed the increased numbers of German merchants in Iran with uneasiness. Some of these had even penetrated inland as far as Isfahan and Kashan and were endeavoring to provide the rug weavers and merchants with their radios, electrical fixtures, and drugs, in exchange for wool and opium, intestines for catgut, and gum tragacanth for chemical usage. Then the order for the detention of the Germans was rumored in the bazaars. The next day the men operating in Kashan disappeared into the sparsely inhabited areas southwest of Isfahan, and it was whispered that they had found refuge with the Lors, a mountain tribe, in that region. The bazaar grew restless and uncertain as to what the future would mean for Kashan.

Esmat was restless also, though she paid little attention to political affairs. As the hot nights came on she lay again on her pallet on the board platform over the water pool and wondered where her husband could be — in the crowded streets of Bagdad, perhaps, turning now and then to peer eagerly under the veil of some careless beauty of Iraq? She sought relief from her nervous tension by visiting her friends, but her tales of Teheran no longer interested her listeners or herself. What was there of interest in Kashan save weddings, births, and deaths? She took to smoking the water pipe her husband's mother had used and sat staring vacantly at the wall before her. Inactivity made her seem middle-aged, pale and listless, although she was only thirty-two.

One night when she could not sleep in the white moonlight that shone through the mosquito net, she turned her head and saw the branches of the lone tree outlined against the moon. Memory stirred. She sat upright and gazed intently at the leafed branches upheld as by an unseen hand. A nightingale burst into song. She could see its feathered form in one of the

topmost branches.

" The Tree of Life," she whispered. " The Tree of Life with its bulbul, the nightingale, singing to me! "

As she gazed into the star-filled, moonlit heavens, like a curtain pulled aside the past opened before her. " My rug! My rug! " she groaned, remembering the vacant spot on the wall so long ago. Again anger flooded her. " He had no right to take it," she said to herself as she had said hundreds of times in the intervening years.

Yet her other rug, hanging alone, had never found its mate. Never had she found a Tree of Life pattern so perfect, so lovely as hers, and she could not bear to hang an inferior one opposite her own handwork.

How long she sat staring at the outlined tree she did not know, but the moon had mounted the heavens and the nightingale had ceased its song before her pain vanished and she lay down and slept at last. She did not recognize the pangs of memory as the birth pains of a new creation; she did not even recognize in this sudden desire for a new rug the hunger that her soul had felt in the empty life of Kashan. She only knew that just before she slept she had resolved to start the mate for her rug; it would be absorbing to watch the Tree of Life pattern unfold again.

The household awoke to fresh activity. Naneh was sent to find Ahmad; Ahmad was sent to the bazaar to purchase the finest foreign wools; the Motavali was consulted and he agreed to set apart a room. Talaat cleaned the room, and then the expert in rug-weaving was asked to bring the cross sections of design and to set up the loom for Esmat.

When the master designer arrived, she was surprised to hear Naneh's whisper that he was the same man her parents had first selected as eligible for her hand. Could it be that this bearded, sedate, middle-aged man had wanted to marry her? She studied him with interest. *He has changed greatly,* she thought. *He is quite different from the young man I found so negligent of the respect due his turban. But I have changed too. I wonder if he realizes who I am!*

Yet he scarcely looked at her and made no attempt to hurry with his task. He merely glanced at the rug she desired to weave, nodded when shown the room, and promised to come on the morrow to supervise the setting up of the loom.

Esmat was piqued by his indifference; she wanted someone to compliment her on her ambitious program. She vented her exasperation in an outburst to Naneh. " Bah! Who does he think he is that he can ignore my request so? Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I want that loom set up today! " She began impatiently tossing the piled wool before her. " Is there no one else in this city who can do this for me? " She turned to Ahmad with her question.

" No one," was his reply. He yawned behind his hand. " Anyway, it is almost noon now. Tomorrow will do as well. Why hurry when it is time for food and rest? "

Naneh soothed her mistress. " We will roll the balls of different colors and be ready when the loom is finished," said she.

" I wanted it ready today! It will take a week to set up that loom," she prophesied.

She was right. For even though the master of rug-weaving came as he promised the next day, he forgot an essential part and left after checking the needed timbers. The following day the mason arrived, and the two uprights were imbedded in mud plaster and cement. It was useless for Esmat to try to hurry them. Tired of delays, she sought refuge in a visit to Soroor, her younger sister, who had married Mansur Gulab, the perfume dealer. When she announced her intention of beginning a new rug Soroor was enthusiastic. Under her praise Esmat began to feel less depressed. " My hands will be slow at first," she admitted. Then a new idea occurred to her. " I shall teach Effat to weave also."

This too met with her sister's approval. It was time that Effat learned what other girls of her age were proficient in, even as she and Soroor had, many years ago.

CHAPTER 23

ALTHOUGH PROVIDED WITH SUFFICIENT FUNDS FOR A LUXURIous journey, Ali elected to travel to the border by bus. He felt that his papers would be less meticulously scrutinized if he were one of many who took the customary pilgrimage before the beginning of the Iranian New Year. And he was correct in his surmise. He attracted no more attention than any of the other twenty pilgrims in the bus that wound slowly down the mountainside until dawn, then over the last portion of the road, hot, dry, and dusty, leading to the Iranian customs post. There too he went unnoticed for his dusty seyid's coat and turban was a common attire. His beard, still short but carefully hennaed, and his dark glasses were identical to those of the other male travelers. Unfeigned weariness was evident in the rounded shoulders and pale face which were quite unlike the military figure that had been his pride before his imprisonment. His passport was examined and stamped for exit, and, after many glasses of tea for the chauffeur and each of the travelers, the creaking bus departed for the Iraq border.

It was hot, the road barren and full of chuckholes; discomfort hovered over everyone. The Iraq customhouse simmered in the heat, silent, deserted, but at the sound of the approaching bus, Iraqi officials poured out on the platform. There was a briskness about them that made Ali breathe a sigh of relief when his passport, properly stamped, was once again in his pocket and the bus started on the last miles to Khanaqin. There Ali intended to board the train, if all went well, leaving forever the group of pilgrims he had been forced to endure for the sake of camouflage.

It was sunset when he separated himself from them in front of the quarantine enclosure in Khanaqin and found his way

to the railroad station. The train appeared in the distance, slowed to a stop, and Ali, with a handful of other pilgrims, found himself at last a stranger in a strange land, hurrying on through the night to Bagdad, the city of his dreams.

There, free from surveillance, free to indulge his whims at last, Ali examined the coffeehouses, the opium dens, the brothels, fascinated by it all. Day after day passed in which he added inspection of the restaurants, the shops, and the theaters. It was a week before he went to the Kazamain Mosque and watched the worshipers kneeling and rising in the hot courtyard.

As the newness began to wear off, Ali recalled his promise to the dervish. Kerbela and An Najaf, new cities in this strange land, awaited his investigation, so he said to the innkeeper one evening, " Tomorrow I will go to An Najaf; keep my room for me until I return."

The desert sands were hot, but the journey to An Najaf in the crowded taxi was not uncomfortable, even though two corpses were part of the load: one lying along the left fenders, one across the bumper in front. Ali purchased the seat beside the driver, an Arab, who raced his car wildly across the track-filled desert, yet picked his way unerringly through the drifted sands. Finally they approached An Najaf, where Ali, *ibn Abu Talib,* the first imam and the cousin and son-in-law of Mohammed, lies buried. The city lay before them brown and dusty, like a desert vulture. Like the vulture, it made its living from the dead of Islam, for An Najaf is a sacred Moslem burial city. Everywhere within it were human vultures: grave diggers, gravestone carvers, writers of prayers for the dead, old men walking its streets half-dead, waiting for death to keep them forever in this city of sacred tradition.

Vultures have little in common with the hawks of the desert who search over barren wastes for living prey. Ali was like the hawk, and he was unhappy among the dying and the dead and those who made their living from them. He paid a scribe to send the certificate of his attendance at the Mosque of An Najaf to the dervish in Kashan; then he took the same seat on the taxi when it returned to Bagdad. He longed to express

his opinion of the place he had visited, but he dared not — Iraqis were quick to take offense at criticism by an Iranian.

That night Ali decided to go at once to Kerbela and be freed of his obligations to the dervish, so he booked a seat in a car going to that sacred city of the Shiites early the next day. Ali was pleased to note that there were no corpses on the car that morning. The desert road was the same, however; the heat of the sands was almost unbearable; the wind blew a hurricane of dust about them. Travel at night was forbidden, for Arab tribes considered unprotected cars with well-dressed passengers legitimate prey.

Ali followed the example of the Arabs and enveloped his head in a silken scarf, but his eyes, which he had not permitted the ignorant Kashan doctors to touch and which had become even more irritated by the journey to An Najaf, now grew red and inflamed. He was glad when finally he could enter the cool courtyard of a pleasant, clean caravansary.

" By Allah and his Prophet! " he said to the innkeeper. " You have a fine place here! Heaven be praised for that! If this had been like the city of the dead in the north of your country, I too would be one fit for its cemetery."

The innkeeper was not offended. " Kerbela is next door to paradise for the living and the gateway to *Bihesht,* our paradise, for the dead. Was it not on the plain near here that Husain, God-appointed imam, grandson of Mohammed, was martyred? "

Ali made himself comfortable in the shade, ordered tea and a room for the night and longer, for he liked his host and enjoyed the pleasant caravansary. For the next few days he wandered at will in the bazaars, the teahouses, the courts of the sacred shrine, and purchased clay tablets, made from the ground made sacred by the blood of Husain, and prayer rosaries to mail to his honored patron and other friends in Iran.

In the bright sun of Iraq and the continuous spring winds Ali's eyes were constantly uncomfortable despite the protecting dark glasses, and finally he consulted an eye doctor recommended to him by the innkeeper. When the doctor assured Ali that his trouble was severe and would require scraping or burn-

ing the lids, which would incapacitate him for a day or two, Ali refused to have it done.

" Is it trachoma? " he asked bluntly.

The doctor nodded his assent, but quickly said: " Formerly it could not be cured, but we of Kerbela can cure any disease. What our drugs do not cure, our prayers do."

Ali's skepticism was apparent in his insistence that he must return to Bagdad the next day. The doctor wrote a prescription for a soothing lotion, then washed his hands of the traveler from Iran.

When Ali reached Bagdad he found a letter from the Mujtahid, telling him that the dervish's health appeared to be failing rapidly and that he should await further news before going on to Mecca. A second letter followed shortly, informing Ali that the palsy had attacked a vital organ and Meshdi Hussein was dead. The Mujtahid added that he had been content to die, for Ali had completed the essential pilgrimages for him. " *Ziaratash Qabul Shode,*" said the people of Kashan. " His vicarious pilgrimage was accepted."

Ali spent little time in grieving for his patron. " Death comes to all men," he said, philosophically, as he reported the facts to the innkeeper. " *Alhambdo l'Illah* — praise God that he did not die before he made me his proxy."

By now Ali's eyes were uncomfortable even at night, and at last he visited the Bagdad oculists. Their verdict was the same: burning with a caustic or scraping of the inflamed lids was essential for a cure. But they gave him another prescription which had a soothing effect, so Ali again decided to forego complete treatment for the time being. Instead, he wandered the streets and associated with friends he had made in the few days after his arrival. It was one of these who urged him to go to Mecca.

" You will not want to go back to Iran until you have seen that shrine too," declared his new friend.

" That is a Sunni Shrine; what have Shiites to do with it? "

" True, but you are a young man; you should know all the Mohammedan shrines now you are so near to them." He added, " If you can get a visa — since the war started in Europe, they

are very strict."

When Ali learned of the visa difficulties, he determined to try his luck; the greater the problem, the more it appealed to Ali. When he was successful in obtaining permission, he made plans to go to Mecca; his adviser was correct, he reasoned — it would help him in later life.

For in his hours of wanderings, Ali had been considering what form of business to enter when he had tired of his journeyings or when his money ran out. He had come to one decision: never again would he enter the ecclesiastical group for a livelihood. He had been watching the priests and noticed the subterfuges they practiced; he was annoyed by the huge fees he was required to pay for a simple certificate of attendance at a shrine. As he stood before the gold-and-silver ornamentation of the tombs of the revered dead of Islam, speculating how much profit the goldsmiths and the silverworkers must have made, how much the mollahs and seyids had accumulated from the sums expended, he seemed to forget that he had been one of their number himself and even now was dressed as they were.

To be a merchant — that would be different. It required brains to make a livelihood among men of that class. If one were clever enough, one could beat the custom officials at their own game and, even as he had sneaked out of Iran, so he could sneak goods, merchandise, tea, and sugar into Iran.

A smuggler! Why not? There were millions to be made if one were cautious. Ali's military service had etched lines of caution; his imprisonment had deepened them; this trip had carved them into his very soul. The cautious man could win at smuggling.

He determined his course. The trip to Mecca next, to study the desert possibilities. It was a good cover for ascertaining the knowledge he needed. Then to Jidda, Basra, and the Persian Gulf ports, via the other leg of the triangle. Six months should see him well established in some shop there, from which he could work north and west in his new trade. Ali heard everywhere of the shortage of Iranian clerks in the hot Gulf cities. He knew he could get a position immediately, if he so desired,

for most northerners would not live in the heat of Basra, Bushire, or Mohammerah. Heat held no terrors for Ali, for Kashan, on the edge of the desert, was hot.

" What difference does temperature make to me? " declared Ali to a friend who had warned him of the Gulf climate. He added to himself: " I have been in the hell of Qasr Kajar. What can be hotter than that? or more uncomfortable? "

When he sought to buy a bus ticket to Mecca, he learned that all the seats had been booked in advance, for it was the lunar month of Zihajjeh, the most acceptable time for pilgrimages to this most sacred of all Mohammedan shrines. However, the ticket seller told Ali that there was always a chance that someone would be unable to go at the last minute, and advised him to be at the bus station the following day with his baggage. Ali followed the man's suggestion, and he was rewarded by finding a vacant seat which he was allowed to purchase five minutes before the time of departure.

It was a typically yellow, dusty day in Iraq. Again Ali followed the example of the Arabs and draped a silk scarf over his head, but the fine desert sand penetrated it and settled in his irritated eyes, even though he had allowed them but a peephole protected by his glasses. Hour after hour the bus crawled along like a desert lizard, dust-colored, dust-enveloped, dust-filled. To all save the chauffeur it seemed as though they were lost in waves of a sea of dust. Yet an atmosphere of friendliness developed within the narrow confines of the dust-encircled bus; beturbaned mollahs and seyids with their sacred green insignia laid side the barriers that normally protected them and talked freely with one another.

During one long stop to cool the hot engine, little groups formed and, inspired by the tea the chauffeur gave them and soothed by their own tobacco, began to discuss politics and the usurpation of religious prerogatives by the military and the camaraderie and unity of travelers sprang up among them.

Ali did not join in the conversation at first. His seat was shared by a young Iranian from Yezd, whose wife sat among the veiled women. By eavesdropping on the discussions, Ali had sensed the man's disagreement with many of the customs

of the Sunnis. After a time the two men began to speak together in low tones, and Ali confided his own true views about some of the superstitions of Islam.

At length the dusty bus ceased its creaking. It had reached Aqiq, the place appointed for travelers from Iraq and Iran to commence their preparations for the ceremonials requisite to entering the harem, the holy of holies, and the *Beit Allah,* the house of Allah. At length their long-desired aim was near. Excited by the presence of many other pilgrims pouring from scores of dusty busses from other cities of Iraq, all seeking merit from this pilgrimage, the travelers from Iran drew closer together. They located the baths, and bathed in water or sand as well as they could to cleanse themselves of external unworthiness in order to achieve true sanctification by their hadj to Mecca. They attired themselves in the ihram, the sacred apparel, of two white seamless drapes — one a loincloth, one a shoulder covering — put on their feet the heelless sandals, and then repeated the customary verse:

" Allahoma, Labeik, labeik!	" O Allah! Yes, yes!
Annal hambda va niamata	Thanks and praise is yours!
Va molk-a-lakala	And majesty is yours;
Sharika laka, labeik! "	You have no equal, truly! "

Now, at last, they were ready to go to the second station of the hadj, Mountain Arafat. As the white-robed crowd stood listening to a brief sermon from a mollah on the mountain slope, the sun set over the dusty desert, flinging banners of rosy tints into the dust-filled sky. It presaged a hot day on the morrow.

It was very warm and quiet as the wind of the day died down, but the duties of the weary pilgrims were not yet accomplished: they must move on to the nearby station of Mashar. There they remained all night, some resting in tents, some content to lie out on the open desert, some busily engaged through the long night in devotional prayers. Ali chose to lie on the desert, and the Yezdi, too excited to sleep, prayed continually throughout the night.

At dawn they went into the valley of Mina, where they com-

pleted more steps in the long ritual: seven small stones were thrown at each of three pillars to put to flight the Evil One; each pilgrim bought an animal — a sheep, a cow, or a camel — for slaughtering in his presence, in order that the meat might later on be given on his behalf to the poor Arabs, parasites clinging to the crowd, who were anxious to acquire still more merit in heaven by these beneficences. Then the last required preparation was completed: heads were shaved, or the hair or nails cut, and at last the pilgrims were ready to enter the harem, the holy of holies of Islam.

Ali and his friends from Yezd were very weary. The dust of their journey and the jolting of the bus had made the Yezdi carsick. He had not slept that night, and the hot sun of the new day, the odor of multitudes of perspiring people, the long walk into the valley of Mina, brought back his nausea. He told Ali that he must be coming down with malaria, for even in that heat he still felt chilly and his head ached.

Ali's eyes troubled him greatly. He kept rubbing them, and complained to his new friend of the heat and the dizziness that he himself was experiencing. Yet none of their party sought to return; they hurried on the faster that they might the sooner reach the coolness of the sacred area about the Kaaba.

Caught by the hurrying crowd, they soon found themselves within the enclosed sanctuary, crossing the courtyard, circumambulating the Kaaba, kissing the Black Stone already worn smooth by the kisses of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. Around the Kaaba they ran with the crowd; seven times they would have to circle it before they could hurry on to the place of Abraham and drink from the well, Zemzem, where legend had it that Hagar had quenched the thirst of little Ishmael.

They had started on their second circumambulation of the holy stone when the Yezdi became violently ill. Fearing lest he defile the sacred places, for he was a strict Moslem with a well-defined knowledge of what was religiously impure, he vomited into his white ceremonial robe; then he sought to leave the crowd.

Ali, blinded by the fresh dust raised by the thousands of

hurrying pilgrims, grabbed his friend by the arm lest they become separated and he lose his own way.

" *Ya Khoda!* Let us out," cried the two.

The Yezdi's wife, pale and excited, let her veil drop and caught her husband's other arm. Push and pull as they might, they could not escape the milling crowd. Around each station of the solemn ritual they were forced to go.

The Yezdi's foul-smelling robe irritated the people nearest to him. Murmurs arose.

" What is that horrible smell? " asked one woman.

" Who are they, those three: the unveiled woman and the two men? " asked another.

" They are Iranians. I heard them talk together," someone answered.

" That smell is dreadful! " cried another. " It will defile our Shrine! "

" Who is defiling our Shrine? The Iranians are Shiites who have no business here! " cried a Sunni priest of Islam.

The word " Shiite " was a match igniting the crowd. They formed a ring about the trio and called for the guards of the Temple, who hurriedly came forward and took them into custody.

Although they protested their innocence of the charges — Shiites defiling the Shrine — at each step, the guards' only reply was, " Let the courts of Arabia decide the matter," as they led them into the jail of Hejaz.

CHAPTER 24

ONCE MORE PRISON DOORS CLOSED ON ALI. THIS TIME IT WAS solitary confinement. And the prison of Iran had been a paradise compared with the cell he now occupied. The glaring sun of Arabia had made it an oven; dust had penetrated its thick doors; the water was so warm that he could hardly drink it and so scarce that he dared not bathe his inflamed eyes. He could hear the rats of Mecca in the walls, and he imagined he felt them running over his feet in the dark of night.

When morning came, he was unable to open his eyes and he had to be led to the courtroom where the trial took place. From the voices he overheard in the corridor, he judged that his friends, the Yezdis, were there also. Who the judge was, and what sort of jury there was, he had no way of telling. After a brief questioning by an interpreter, Ali was led back to his cell, where he spent another night of discomfort and imaginings.

When the guard took him out of the cell again the following morning, Ali forced his inflamed eyes open. The darkness of the corridor was not especially annoying, but the square of sunlight as they faced the open door completely blinded him. His eyes closed involuntarily in self-protection and, try as he would, he could not reopen them. When his custodians realized that he was not feigning blindness, they pushed and pulled him into the courtyard, where the sound of hurrying feet and the sobbing of a woman and her prayers of pleading filled the air.

Trembling with excitement and shocked by this sudden inability to see, Ali stood silent with his back against a wall. He could hear stern male voices speaking Arabic, but he could not catch the unfamiliar guttural sounds clearly enough to

understand what was being said.

A silence fell, heavy and impressive as the black meteor rock of the Kaaba. Then an agonized scream, sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, forced his eyelids apart. A short distance away he saw the decapitated body of the Yezdi lying on the ground, the head with staring eyes in the hands of an Arabian policeman.

It was the victim's wife who had screamed and now had fallen in a faint at her dead husband's feet. Involuntarily Ali's eyes closed, like the shutter of a camera, but the scene had printed itself indelibly on his brain.

Was he to be the next victim?

He recoiled as a man touched him. " In God's name, leave me alone! " he begged.

His terror was groundless, for the guiding hand led the blind prisoner to his cell once more. Along endless corridors they went, down steps, through another corridor to a cell in the far end, where Ali was pushed inside. The heavy door was slammed shut and he heard the wooden bars dropped into place.

He was alone with his memory, alone in the darkness, alone in his blindness. The hours passed slowly. The horrible scene in the courtyard haunted him — sometimes it was the bodiless head he saw, and sometimes the headless body of his companion on the pilgrimage. Over and over the picture repeated itself, and the sound of the woman's scream echoed and re-echoed in his ears.

Time moved with the camel's slow pace, and Ali grew more and more uneasy at the uncertainty of his own fate. Alone, with no one to plead for him, no one to supply his wants, no one to care whether he lived or died, he awoke at last to a tardy realization of what Esmat had done for him. Her words the day he had ordered her to return to Kashan came back to him: " I? I? Who loved you? You would have died if I had not — " Was he to die on the morrow as the Yezdi had today?

Terror constricted his throat. He reached for the water jar to quench his sudden thirst, but he could not find it where he thought it should be. He began a careful search on his hands and knees, feeling cautiously all about the tiny cell. As he

backed away from the door his foot touched something damp. Imagining it to be one of the rats he had heard in the night, he kicked angrily at it. The crash of the earthenware jug broke the stillness. Moaning with disappointment, Ali put his lips to the floor and tried to drink the spilled liquid, but the thirsty mud floor stole it first.

In desperation he shook the barred door; he called loudly for help; he begged for water.

No one came. What could it mean? Had he been forgotten? He had prayed to be left alone, but he had not meant this, this horror of neglect.

Long after he was certain that night had come and he had been left alone until morning, he heard footsteps approaching his cell. The door was unlocked, unbarred, and opened.

" Water! " begged Ali, kicking the broken jar lying at his feet. " My eyes are bad. I could not see. I broke the jar."

The prison warden seemed not to hear. Instead, he deliberately lighted a cigarette and leaned lazily against the door, studying Ali through half-closed eyes.

After a few moments of silence, Ali cried out again: " In God's name, give me water! Would you deprive a blind man of water? "

" It is the punishment of God that you are blind. You have desecrated our Shrine. You are a Shiite."

Ali tried to moisten his lips with his dry tongue. Hoarsely he swore a fierce oath. " By the holy Prophet, I am innocent of these charges. Give me water."

" Have you money? "

" None," Ali lied quickly. " They took it all away."

" A pilgrim to the shrines of Iraq and Mecca with only five dinars cash! " The warden watched Ali for a while as he clung to the bars and begged again for water, then he pulled the door as if to close it. " Water costs money in Mecca," he said.

" A dinar for a jug of water! Ten dinars if you set me free! " Ali cried desperately.

The man smiled craftily. " Show it to me. Then we will talk business." He picked up the lantern and held it high to watch

what Ali would do.

The yellow rays of light silhouetted Ali as he fumbled in his green kamarband and drew forth a small roll of bills, trying to turn away from the warden as he did so, but the man judged accurately the size of the roll Ali uncovered.

" Give me one for water and twenty for freedom! " he said. " I will have none left for my return to Bagdad! "

The jailer puffed at his cigarette. " The Yezdi did not need his money."

Again the picture of the bloody head of his friend swam before Ali's inflamed eyes. Again fear shook him. He held out his roll. " Take it," he cried. " Take it all, but set me free."

His purpose achieved, the jailer pocketed the bills, pushed open the door, and bade Ali follow him. One hand groping along the wall, Ali followed the man up the stairs through the upper corridor and toward a door, which, a cool breeze told his alert senses, was open.

The jailer pushed him out. " Go! " he ordered. " Go, and never let us see you again in this sacred city."

As Ali heard the door close behind him, he cried: " Water! You promised me water! "

A laugh was his only answer. Ali dared not call again lest someone higher in authority hear him and question his release. He had no way of knowing that the court, satisfied with the blood of the Yezdi, had confiscated the money he had had in his purse to pay the costs of the trial and ordered his release that morning. The clever jailer had guessed right; Ali had not given up all his funds.

Penniless, blind, alone, Ali groped his way along the prison wall into the quiet night. He had not gone far before a snarl and a growl warned him that he had trodden on one of the many wild dogs of Mecca who prowled the city at night, seeking food dropped by the beggars of the Shrine. Ali drew away in fear, but the dog sprang after him and nipped his leg. Another growled nearby. Ali hurried, stumbling over the cobblestones. His haste aroused all the dogs sleeping in front of the prison.

Far away a door opened and a man's voice called out: " Guard! What is all this noise about? "

Ali turned toward the sound. " Save me! I am blind! The dogs are biting me." He kicked at the nearest one.

All the dogs snarled angrily; a few of the most daring nipped again at Ali's heels. He answered with another kick, but instead of a dog's soft body, he hit a stone with such force that he fell prostrate in the street. The dogs leaped upon him, each one trying to revenge itself against its eternal enemy, man — all the men of Mecca — who abused the dogs continually.

More doors opened. A guard from the prison rushed up, his gun pointed at the group of animals surrounding the prostrate man. Without pausing to take careful aim, he fired at the animal reaching for Ali's throat. As the bullet struck him the dog slumped over the prone man who jerked with a spasm and lay still.

At the sound of the gun all the dogs save the one motionless on Ali's body slunk away into the night. Men came running from all sides. The guard hastily pulled the dead animal from Ali's chest and leaned over the prostrate form listening for a heartbeat.

" By Allah! He is dead! Fear has killed him! "

" Who is he? " asked a dozen male voices.

" God knows! He is dead! Fear killed him! "

One man leaned closer and touched Ali's head, cried out with horror as his fingers felt blood: " He is shot! Your bullet killed him, not fear! "

The curious crowd pressed closer, each man trying to see for himself whether fear of the dog or a bullet was the cause of death.

The excited guard was suddenly afraid. He raised his gun and fired into the night. Other armed guards from the prison hurried toward the group, and one by one the spectators backed away from the guns, disappearing into the shadows of their open doors.

A sergeant of the guards appeared, followed by a man with a lantern. " What happened? Who is this man? Who did you shoot? " he asked.

The sentry, confronted by authority, spoke in quick defense. " No man has any business prowling around at night in

Mecca. I only shot the dog who would have killed him anyway."

" But who is the dead man? " He turned to another. " Go get the chief jailer," he ordered.

The jailer appeared so promptly that it was obvious he too had been disturbed by the unaccustomed noises near the prison.

" Give me the lantern," commanded the sergeant. " Do you know this man? Have you missed a prisoner? "

The jailer leaned low over the corpse and his mouth dropped open as he recognized Ali. " The Irani! The blind Irani! *Ya Khoda!* Is he dead? "

He stared upward at the sergeant, who repeated, " The blind Irani! " then added: " Dead? Of course he's dead, shot in the neck like that. What I want to know is, did he escape or was he released at this hour of the night? "

The jailer stood upright, automatically reached for a cigarette. His fingers touched Ali's roll of dinars. The hand that struck the match began to tremble as the jailer realized the consequences of becoming implicated. In his anxiety to keep his bribe secret, he told the truth for once: " Yes, his release was ordered this morning. What difference does day or night make to a blind man? I was busy until evening."

The sentry who had shot the dog broke into the conversation: " He said he was blind, I heard him. If he was the Irani, he was a Shiite also."

The jailer took his cue from the guard: " You are right; he was a Shiite from Iran. Assuredly he was guilty of defiling our Shrine and Allah, who knows all things, has punished him as he deserved. We should have executed him with the Yezdi."

The sergeant of the guards turned to his men. " Take him away. Bury him next to that accursed Shiite. Can a man escape his fate? It was his kismet to die in Mecca."

CHAPTER 25

THE BRIEF TELEGRAM ANNOUNCING ALI'S DEATH WAS DELIVERED to the Mujtahid, who took the news first to the Motavali, then walked slowly and sadly to his daughter's home. He found Esmat studying the rug design she planned to commence that day. From her surprised look at his unexpected visit, her father could tell that she had heard nothing yet, and he stood undecided whether to tell her or not.

But she noticed from his manner that something was wrong. "What is it?" she asked. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I have a telegram from Mecca, but I am not certain it is correct. I shall telegraph for details."

"From Ali! Then he did get to Mecca! What is the news?" she said eagerly.

Silently he handed her the telegram.

When its meaning penetrated her consciousness, she gave a loud scream and flung it across the room. "Life is finished for me!" she cried. "I've lost my good husband, the father of my children, the head of our family!" She beat her head against the rug; she wept and wailed in the agony of her grief; she tore her hair out in bunches; she ripped her clothing into rags.

Her mother and sisters sought to comfort her and she heard her husband extolled by all who came to console her, but still she continued to rock back and forth, a somber, disheveled figure of distress, pitied by all. Before the first day was ended, her mother brought her a complete wardrobe of clothes suitable for a widow of Kashan, insisting that she control herself or she would make herself ill, and then what would become of her children?

Esmat listened to her mother while she changed her apparel, but at the mention of her children began to sob again: " My poor children! They have no father now. I will have to raise them alone! "

All through the night her sobs kept others from sleeping. Only the muezzin's call to prayer at dawn aroused her and automatically she performed her ablutions and said the requisite prayers. The morning sun found her seated cross-legged, rocking back and forth, clothed in renewed grief. The telegram supplying the details requested was as brief as the first. " Accidentally shot in a riot," it read.

For three days the family, assisted by relatives and servants, distributed food to the poor. The relatives remained day and night in the Motavali's home, sharing sorrow and food with the bereaved family. On the evening of the sixth day a special meal was prepared and given to the needy. But Esmat did not cease her weeping and mourning to help in these activities. When forty days had elapsed, her parents insisted that she lay aside her sorrow, and this time, trembling with weakness, pale and emaciated from her hysterical grieving, she assisted in the final distribution of food to the poor.

Forcibly pulled out of her cloud of sorrow by the customs of her people, Esmat found herself a nervous wreck, unable to awaken from her nightmare. Even when Ali was in Qasr Kajar, she had refused to consider the possibility of his sudden death. Now while night enveloped the sleeping household she lay awake, dry sobs racking her, peering into the darkness, trying to pierce the curtain of the future. Yet back of it all she felt a strange relief she would not admit to anyone, least of all to herself: that the specter of forsaken wifehood had vanished.

After all, to be a widow was a fate decreed by God Almighty; there was no disgrace attached to it. Her fear of being a woman without honor, a deserted wife, had disappeared, washed clean with the tears of her bereavement.

When news of his son's death reached the Motavali, he was stunned. Close upon it arrived word of the execution of the

Yezdi by the order of the judge of the court of Hejaz. All the information that could be gathered concerning this proved beyond question that the action had been quite unwarranted, and the Shiites of Iran, of which he was one, united in demanding retribution for the martyrdom of the Yezdi. Political and religious discussions followed which he listened to but took no part in — they could not soften his horror at the death of his own son.

For in his heart he knew this had been merited. Had not Ali derided his religion, cursed it in fact, in his very presence? The cankerworm of this knowledge ate into his vitals and benumbed him so that for days he neither ate nor slept. His son was dead by the swift hand of God who had dealt this sudden blow, for what else could it have been but God's own punishment? To him there seemed nothing left worth living for.

Nights and days were alike in their burden of heavy sorrow. The first faint hope to comfort his stricken soul was this: he would sell all he had and spend his life, a recluse of Islam, at the door of the Shrine in Kerbela. The more he considered it, the more brightly the light of hope shone. He would redeem the sins of his heretic son, by his life of devotion, by his own self-sacrifice to Islam. No one need ever know why he had chosen to live thus.

As his purpose grew firmer, his numbness passed away. He summoned Ahmad and ordered him to take stock of his possessions, to offer his villages for immediate sale, to have the Mujtahid, who was a notary, come the following week for the legal transfer of his home to his grandchildren.

His friends in Kashan approved of his decision to go to Kerbela. It was essential for the peace of his soul that this pilgrimage be taken, they said, and probably he would go on to Mecca and verify the account of his own son's death. The Motavali did not correct the rumors. Knowing that he would never return to Kashan, he kept his silent counsel, and if the night winds caught his sighs and bore them gently over the garden wall into the *kucheh,* they seemed only to whisper: " Islam, Islam, a sin in Islam! "

A month later the Motavali left for Teheran. His successor in

the priestly office had been appointed; his villages had been sold; his grandchildren had been provided for; all contacts with the past had been severed. He had lived in a world of his own, paying no attention to the rumors of political unrest in the capital and giving no credence to the wild news that the strong ruler he admired so greatly, Riza Shah Pahlavi, had resigned the throne and left the country with his son, the crown prince, ruling in his stead.

Near Qum he stared like one in a dream at the tents of the foreign armies. Whence they had come and why, he did not know and cared less, so overwhelmed he was by his own sorrow. He hurried into the golden-domed Shrine of Hezrati Fatima and was comforted by the coolness and calm of its beauty. This, at least, was unchanged. When night came, he reached Shahzadeh Abd ul Azim, and in the dusty darkness before dawn again sought a shrine where he lay on the tiled floor, too weary to sleep but content to be covered by the cloak of his priesthood in the Sahn of the temple.

In the morning he arrived in Teheran and set about obtaining his passport and visas for the remainder of his proposed journey. But the past weeks had seen great changes in the relations between Iraq and Iran; no passports were to be granted, no pilgrimages permitted, until the difficulties occasioned by the execution without proper trial of a son of Iran were smoothed away diplomatically.

The Motavali, distressed beyond measure, wandered the streets in a fog of uncertainty until he located the Mosque Sepah-salar. Surely here in the garden so near the Parliament he could find rest while he considered what to do next. He laved his weary feet and hands and face and joined the crowd for the evening prayers. His genuflections were automatic; he seemed to have no body of his own, only a burning desire to leave no part of the customary ritual, however small it might be, undone.

A few men in military attire crowded past the group busily engaged in prayers, and memories of Ali in uniform, erect and handsome, stabbed the Motavali as he watched them. Like his errant son, they seemed to have no religion, for they did not

share in the prayers. Anxiety for Islam, weariness from his journey, the indecision of his own plans drove sleep from him, and again insomnia held him in restless bonds until the muezzin mounted the minarets at early dawn and called all true followers to rise and say their morning prayers.

The Motavali rose in answer to the summons. At last he had made his decision — he would go to Meshed instead of Kerbela. Was there not a holy shrine there as well? The grave of Imam Riza, on him be peace! It would be the answers to his problems. How often he had pictured to would-be pilgrims the beauties of the golden dome, the inimitable tile patterns of its porticoes, the hand tooling of the gold and silver fretwork enclosing the remains of this one of Islam's greatest imams! Yet never had he seen it himself.

Weary as he was, he purchased a bus ticket that same day, and by evening began the five-hundred-and-fifty-mile journey along the foothills of the Elburz mountains. The bus, loaded with pilgrims, wound its way down to the monotonous plain, across the barren stretches, on and on, to the hill from which the golden dome could first be seen. Many, many times the passengers had stopped for tea, for a rest in the shade, to repair tires or cool the motor. Always they had been glad to move on. But here, on the hilltop, they erected piles of stones by the roadside and said their prayers in gratitude for their safe arrival at this spot.

The Motavali's head swam with weariness when the three days and nights of his journey were ended and he entered the Shrine at last. He could do nothing but lie in a stupor of exhaustion on the tiles of the beautifully arched mausoleum. His sleep, when it finally overcame him, was haunted. Ali, with inflamed eyes and corpselike head, appeared in his dreams and touched his father's cheek with an icy forefinger. The old man screamed as his son's chilly finger passed from his temple around his chin and he sat bolt upright, his hand pressed to his cheek, one side of which was slowly sagging down as the nerve controlling the muscle released its hold.

" A stroke! " he muttered. " The finger of Ali foretells my death."

Day after day he sat in the shadow of the Shrine; at night he slept under its portico, awaiting the final summons he was certain would come soon. Pilgrims tossed him coins; the mollahs permitted his silent presence; but not until death actually claimed him did anyone know that he had been the learned Motavali of Kashan, the father of the ill-fated Ali.

Only two months had passed since his son's death before he rested forever in the grave near the Shrine of Imam Riza.

The evidences of military occupation which the Motavali had seen as he traveled the dusty road between Qum and Teheran were but the backwash of the wave of war which had reached Iran. The crest of the wave cast tens of thousands of refugees on the shores of the Caspian Sea. From there, emaciated with hunger, sick with multitudinous diseases, they crawled up the winding road to the plateau, stared in amazement at the plentifully filled shops, and proceeded to exchange their inedible jewels and gold for the foods of Iran.

The new Government seemed unable to cope with this abnormal situation. Bread, the mainstay of life in Iran, became bad, mixed with millet and straw as the bakers sought to profit from the demands of the refugees. When the people complained, they replied: " Give us wheat, more wheat! What can we do when we have no wheat flour? " Men in authority reached eager hands toward the supplies in the provinces. As food in Kashan became scarcer and more expensive all wheat was seized by the Government in order to control distribution.

Then even the well-to-do families began to feel the pinch. When the Motavali had summoned Esmat's father and willed the home his family had long occupied to his grandchildren, Esmat was informed of it. She was dimly grateful that she and her children would never be homeless. Yet when the period of forty days' mourning was completed and her father-in-law left Kashan on the journey that ended in his death, she finally realized that there would be no more income from the family villages, for he had invested the money from their sale in a syndicate which Esmat instinctively distrusted. A village was a tangible thing; well supervised it meant money. But now all

was gone, and this other source of wealth she feared. In her grief Esmat felt that life had not been fair, and that she had not deserved the deaths of her husband and his parents.

Her father seemed suddenly to have aged too. Was it possible that the passing of his friends, first the dervish and then the Motavali, or the abdication of the powerful shah of the Pahlavi dynasty in whom he had placed so much faith for the rejuvenation of Iran, had made him sensible to the flight of time? His hair was almost white at the roots now, making fresh henna necessary frequently in order to keep it the bright color he preferred. But he could not fool his daughter; she saw he was an old man.

Still the Mujtahid provided the necessities of life for his widowed daughter and her children. But it was Soroor, Esmat's sister, who gave her fruit from her garden and cheer from her home. Esmat grew more sensitive as a recipient than she had been when Ali was imprisoned. Then she had hoped to return the favors; now she saw no possible end to the time when she must accept daily assistance from her own family.

It was late autumn before Esmat thought again of the closed room and its idle loom. When she opened the door, the naked strings of the loom seemed to reproach her for not clothing them with the lovely colors lying nearby. As she idly fingered the strands of wool and glanced at the cross section of design slipped between the strings of the warp, once more she felt the urge of creation.

She turned to Naneh. "Where is Effat?" she asked. "Let her come and we will weave."

Effat, bored with the sameness of her days, came gladly and seated herself opposite, working on the mate to her mother's rug, assisted at times by Naneh and Fati so that the two would be completed simultaneously.

The winter passed, and the pattern grew ever more beautiful as it unfolded, knot by knot. Nosrat, the master designer, came more often to direct the intricacies of the tree branches, the nightingale, and the green-coated flycatcher just glimpsed through the leaves, and Esmat found herself absorbed by the spell of weaving. As spring flung its soft colors over the brown

plains and the trees were green-clad again, she determined to complete her rug tree.

At supper one evening, in the silence following the first serving of pilau, Parvin cried, " Listen to the bird in our tree! "

" *Morghe haqq,* the owls, are nesting! " answered her brother. " Hear them call to each other! "

" They are saying: ' *Haqq! Haqq!* God! God! ' " said Parvin. " Where are they? "

Esmat found herself hunting as eagerly as the children to discover the small, brown-feathered owl in the dark shadows of the mulberry tree.

" He does not want us to find him! " cried Ali Naqi in disappointment. " Why can we never see him? "

" The bird of *haqq* always hides from people," said Effat knowingly. " Doesn't it, mother? "

" It is only about at night when the shadows are darkest," their mother replied.

Their supper finished, the children went to bed under the big mosquito net on the wooden platform over the cement-lined water pool. After Esmat joined them later, she lay listening to the rhythmic repetition of the owls. One called and another answered: " *Haqq! Haqq!* " They sounded like people talking to each other. What did their call really mean? *Haqq!* Was it not God? Sometimes it meant truth too. Could that be what God was? Slowly she felt a strange yearning, a discontent with the pattern of her life. What was left for her now? The owl nearest her called: " *Haqq! Haqq!* God! Truth! "

She found herself answering: " What is the truth? What is God? Where can I find him? "

Could it be her overworked imagination that heard in the faraway call of the owl's mate: " Here, here is the truth."

" Here? In Kashan? " Her mind answered her imagined query. " No, not here, surely, for even the few women who really unveiled are again hiding under the veil of Islam. A few more years and all will be as it was twenty years ago."

Yet again the owl continued to call: " *Haqq!* Truth! What is the truth? "

And its mate answered, " Truth is here; here is the truth."

It was late when she slept beside her children under the starry heavens, and through her dreams the voices of the wise birds of Iran still echoed.

In the morning she stared at her rug which was nearing the treetop of its design. The Tree of Life pattern had come down through generations unchanged; yet even as she studied it she found her fingers skillfully sorting out the brown wools hanging on the side of the rug frame.

" Only one," she whispered to herself. " It will make it lovelier by contrast." She started a point of brown knots and worked eagerly day after day until the designer made his next visit.

" What is that you have done? " he cried sharply. " There is no brown on that branch."

Esmat grew suddenly shy. " I know it. I thought — it is — " She hesitated, grew silent at his stern criticism.

" You will have to take it out," Nosrat commanded. " It is not in the pattern."

" I know. I put it there intentionally." She spoke daringly. " May I not change the pattern a little? "

He looked at her accusingly. " Why should you want to change it? It is a good pattern our forefathers have woven for centuries. What is it you have started in it? "

" Only a bird, another bird," protested Esmat.

" A brown bird! There are no such birds in our rugs. A bulbul, a nightingale, with its spotted breast, a flycatcher with its green coat, a wagtail, a peacock — but not this! What is it? "

The children, listening curiously to the conversation, turned to look at each other. " I know! " cried Parvin. " It is the *Morghe haqq,* the bird of God we heard last week! Isn't it? "

Esmat nodded quickly in assent.

" The bird of truth! " said Nosrat. He looked at Esmat as if seeing her for the first time. " You are a wise woman," he said. " The Tree of Life design needs the bird of God to complete it." Rapidly he began to sketch the brown bird in the cross section of the design, paying no attention to the sudden flame of color that swept over Esmat's face.

As he worked he continued: "But you must not have it thus; it must be hidden. One sees the colors of the flycatcher in the entire bird; one watches the bulbul in the moonlight pouring out its songs; but for the bird of truth one searches. You must show only a glimpse of it. Is not truth always hidden?"

"You are right," assented Esmat. "Let people search for my bird."

She watched him perfect the pattern, obeyed his curt directions to take out many knots of the brown she had begun and insert leaf green. "You are truly a master designer," she said gratefully as he completed his task. He moved cautiously down from the high plank, bowed stiffly, and departed, without looking at her again.

She worked until dusk. That night she did not lie awake; instead she fell asleep as her mind sketched the new pattern, like an eager, happy child, even as she was longing for daylight that she might return to her weaving.

Esmat found the days too short for this new interest. She ceased to take time out for prayers and no longer reminded the children to recite the Arabic Koran for her. Creation of a tiny portion of a new pattern, praise from the designer, weaving, weaving, wiped all else from her program.

Weeks later the rug hung finished on the loom, ready to be cut down and shorn of its unevenness. All Kashan had heard of the change in design, so little, yet so significant, so startling because of its obvious appropriateness. The head of the owl looked out from between branches and one could almost hear it call: "God! God! *Haqq! Haqq!*"

CHAPTER 26

FABULOUS PRICES FOR THE WONDERFUL PERFUMES OF KASHAN and a scarcity of glass containers prompted Mansur Gulab, Esmat's brother-in-law, to plan a journey to Teheran. He and Soroor had had a recent sorrow in the sudden death of a small son, so he suggested that his wife accompany him — the change would be good for her. She was thrilled beyond words to leave the city of her birth for the first time.

Esmat was consulted about her apparel. Looking with the eyes of a traveled woman at her plump, jolly sister, Esmat realized that she was not exactly chic. " Let your clothes alone! What difference do they make? You are not staying in Teheran," she advised her sagely.

" May God forbid! " cried Soroor. " I just want to see for myself what you have told me about so many times, then return to my children."

" You might want to stay," warned Esmat. " I did."

" Never! I'd a thousand times rather have my lovely roses here, our cool basement for the summer, my happy children! "

Soroor's baby might not have died had she been in Teheran where there are good doctors, Esmat thought, but she pushed the thought away, for with it, unbidden, had come its parallel: *And mine might have been born, had Ali and I always lived in Kashan.* She stared at the dowry rug with its old design on the wall before her, and suddenly she wearied of its sameness; she wanted to break with the past. Why be reminded forever of the pain Ali had caused her? So she ordered Naneh to take it down.

" I need money," she told Soroor. " Father says the investments that the Motavali made with the money from his villages have failed. Perhaps Mansur could sell this rug in Teheran.

They say foreigners are paying high prices for them these days."

Soroor agreed. "We'll be glad to — Mansur knows all the Kashan dealers." Her voice trailed off as she hurried to another room after one of her active children.

Esmat followed her to the doorway. "Be sure to call on father's friend, the Ostad of Literature in the University — you'll like him. And I wish you would bring me some new schoolbooks for Effat — he will tell you what ones to buy. She must study like the girls in Teheran."

Then, as if in afterthought, she called again, "See if you can find me one of the books the Christians use."

Soroor returned to the room. "You mean their Bible? What do you want that for?"

Esmat looked away. "There's something in it about a wise woman — I'd like to read it again. Solomon said it. He was one of the prophets of Islam too."

Soroor laughed. "That man with all the wives? He should have known about women! But I've seen that book in father's study. Why not ask him for it?"

"I'd rather not bother him," said Esmat. "One more thing — be sure to call on the Jangju family — they were always so kind to me. And will you please give this to the mother?" She held up a silver perfume holder shaped like a tiny water jug. "Tell her I shall always think of her when I see an underground water stream."

After Mansur and Soroor left for Teheran, Esmat went oftener to her mother's, but Fatima, like her husband, seemed to have aged greatly. Mother and daughter had little in common, and arguments over the upbringing of the three children were frequent, especially when Fatima maintained that girls of Effat's age should keep the fast, prepare themselves for marriage, and remain veiled before men.

Esmat, remembering the happy girls of Teheran, resented her mother's interference. Iran could never be the same as before the unveiling, she felt; women never could be blind to their freedom. They had emerged, like the chrysalis from its cocoon. Her simile pleased her: *We were hidden under our*

black chuddars in just that same way, and now we are using our wings, she thought. And so she decided to visit her mother less often, since she could neither appreciate nor understand the gulf that separated their generations.

Now that her rug was completed Esmat was restless — monotony like a dust cloud from the desert crept over her, enveloping her in its brown folds, strangling thoughts of the future. It was dispersed, at length, by the return of the travelers. Mansur and Soroor had had a wonderful time, but they were overjoyed to be back in friendly Kashan. And Soroor had returned wearing the black veil of Islam again! She told of seeing women in the streets of Teheran wearing veils whenever or wherever they desired.

Esmat was astonished at this, but she said: " I don't care how many go back to the veil, I won't wear one and I won't make Effat wear one. There is absolutely nothing in the Koran that makes it obligatory; the shah proved that. Besides, good veils are too expensive."

Her sister laughed. " I'm only wearing a veil because I'm expecting another baby! " Then she changed the subject. " We sold your rug! Guess how much! "

Esmat guessed, but Soroor would not tell her how far wrong she was; she would let her husband report on the deal. Instead, she handed her a gift from Mrs. Jangju. " You cannot imagine what nice things she said about you. She said you deserved something frivolous."

Esmat unwrapped the package and held up a pair of sheer black hose. " How lovely! Are they from Paris? "

" Probably; the French excel in silkwork, don't they? And here are the books you asked for."

Esmat looked eagerly at the titles of new books of science, literature, and mathematics, as Soroor continued her chatter: " The Ostad selected them. This one is for you — his own copy of the Book of the Christians. He has marked many places that he likes and thought you would also."

Esmat found her own name written on the flyleaf, and underneath it two lines of Persian script. " What is this he has written? A quotation from Hafiz! "

" What does it say? " Soroor leaned over the page as her sister read the beautiful Persian script aloud:

" If thou like Christ be pure and singlehearted,
The very sun is brightened by thy light imparted."

" Rhythmic, isn't it? " said Soroor, chattering on like the cheery wren she resembled. " And what do you think? He invited Ali Naqi to spend next winter in Teheran as a companion for his son."

Esmat turned quickly to her sister. " Did he really? It would be wonderful for Ali Naqi to go to school in Teheran! Only I could not let him unless I paid his expenses. And where would I get the money? "

" Wait until you hear how much we got for your rug! Why don't you and the girls go to Teheran too? You're still young and attractive, Esmat — someone is sure to want to marry you! Or if you wanted to work, you are clever enough too. You ought to see all the women going to offices every day, working for large salaries, side by side with the men."

Soroor stopped her chatter as Mansur entered. " You had very good luck," he told Esmat. " We sold your rug to a dealer from Kashan who sold it that very day to an American colonel for three thousand tomans. He would not take any commission this time, because he is a friend of mine and you are a widow. But he hopes you will send him other rugs as perfect as that one."

" Three thousand tomans! " cried Esmat in surprise. " We can live for two years on that! "

" Well, perhaps not quite that long — you forget how high food prices are," Mansur said. " Here is another book — the rug designer recommended it for you."

Esmat discovered that it was filled with colored designs of the rugs of Iran. " How beautiful! I did not know there were so many lovely designs! " Then she added sensitively, " You bought this with my money, I hope? "

" Of course," laughed Soroor. " We decided you could afford it now! "

After they left, Esmat stood alone with her thoughts. A

weight seemed lifted from her. Now that she had money she need not depend any longer on Mansur's generosity or her father's gifts. Should she follow Soroor's suggestion — go to Teheran and leave Kashan forever? Find work in someone's office? Remarry? She dismissed that thought at once, telling herself that no one wanted a widow with three children. Where was real happiness to be found? Teheran or Kashan?

The garden door opened and the children rushed in. " Where are the new books? " they cried. Seeing them lying on the table, they all hurried toward them.

Esmat turned over the pages of the book of designs. *What fun it would be to weave one of these!* she thought. *And now I have money for wools. Praise Allah! I can weave again!*

Suddenly she realized she had made her decision. She would weave again here in her own home, and support her children by doing what she loved most. It might be slower, less spectacular, but she would not need to leave her children alone, or with her mother who would try to shape them into the mold of the past.

Ahmad the nazir, now the proprietor of a nearby coffeehouse, appeared in answer to Esmat's summons and purchased more wools for her. On the advice of the rug designer, she chose a Shah Abbas pattern for her next rug. " You cannot change that rug," Nosrat told her.

" No," she replied. " The past is past; it cannot be changed. But we can learn much from it."

He chose another design from his case. " Why do you cling to the past? Only a pattern of life offers variety. This is new; do you like it? "

Esmat studied it awhile, then shook her head in negation.

" Why do you not like it? You have laid aside the veil, you have adopted many of the foreign styles. This design has not been tried in Iran. What is there about it you do not like? "

She hesitated, picked up a pencil, pointed to one motif: " This one — this is repeated too often. It is not ancient enough to warrant so much repetition. And it is not beautiful enough to build on like the motifs in our old, old designs."

" You are right — it is too new for our hand-woven rugs." He said no more, but busied himself collecting his papers.

Esmat turned to her chosen design. " I would lose myself in the past," she said. " Iran has had a wonderful history."

He started her on the rug she had selected and left. When the sun was setting, she came out of the room, tired but happy in the beginning of a new rug.

That evening, after the children were in bed, Mansur and Soroor called to bring her an offer of marriage from Nosrat.

" But he has a wife! " cried Esmat in surprise.

" She has agreed," said Mansur. " She says it is only a business arrangement and will make them richer in the end."

" I! A second wife — a *havoo!* Never! "

Mansur urged her not to refuse at once. " It is a sound business proposition. He says you have great artistic ability and could help him with his designs. He has not the money to pay you a salary, but if you agreed he would keep you and the children in your own home, visiting you only when you wished. Yet he would be free to consult you whenever he pleased. It has been the custom in Iran for centuries."

" Think it over," pleaded Soroor.

Naneh, standing in the doorway as usual, urged proper consideration of the offer. " It is a good chance for you. Remember, he was your first suitor. I can tell from experience few men want to marry widows in Kashan. As his wife your future would be secure."

Esmat refused to discuss the matter. " I will not consider being a second wife! " she told them.

But when she was alone that night, she did consider the offer, secretly pleased that the designer had sought her in marriage. A feeling of inferiority had cloaked her ever since Ali's return from prison. And her widowhood, while it had centered her on the stage for a while, was too common a state in Kashan — she was weary of it already.

So when the morrow came, Esmat was undecided. She was nervous and irritated and refused to let Naneh talk to her. If she had thought to escape her indecision temporarily, she was mistaken, for whenever she studied the design, she seemed to see the face of her adviser: calm, thoughtful eyes; firm mouth outlined by the neatly trimmed beard.

" He is a homely old man," she said to herself. " He is careless in his religion. Even if he knows his work well, he should not neglect *that!* " She tried to forget him by weaving faster and faster. Finally, flinging aside the wools, she got up from the floor where the border was beginning to show color and went into the garden. There she found her three children in the midst of a quarrel. Ali Naqi had seized Effat's new books and would not give them up.

" He will tear them to pieces," screamed Effat in anger.

Esmat sought to take them away from her son who, in selfish delight at the commotion he had engendered, was running round and round the pool, fiendishly brandishing the cherished books. Parvin joined Effat, yelling for Naneh to come and help and grabbing Ali by the arm in an endeavor to stop him. He turned furiously on her, flung the books away. One fell into the water, the other on a potted plant. His hands free, Ali Naqi grabbed for Parvin's curly hair. The two girls screamed loudly, the one from pain, the other from anguish at the thought of her ruined books.

It was a long time before Naneh and Esmat could quiet the children. They finally restored peace by banishing the son and heir to the men's quarters, escorted by the gardener, and fishing out the water-soaked book for Effat. Naneh showed her how to put an almond between each page and place it where it would dry quickly, while Parvin sobbed in her mother's arms.

As Esmat soothed her, she said to her daughters: " Why do you always tease your brother so? You make him a little demon, a veritable Satan."

" He's so mean," cried Effat. " He ruined my book on purpose."

Esmat scolded them. " If you were good to him, he wouldn't do such things. Why can't you be kind to him like your cousins are to their brother? I never saw them quarrel as you do! "

" They have a father and we don't! " said Parvin defensively.

Her remark brought Esmat's thoughts back to the question that was still undecided. *She is right. Ali Naqi needs a man to train him,* she thought. Then she remembered — *Ali would*

be only a stepson; Nosrat has sons of his own.

Night came again. When the children were quiet at last, Esmat determined to decide the matter definitely. Yet each time she approached the physical picture of her suitor, her mind rebelled. He was so unlike her tall, commanding, handsome Ali. She did not realize that in the year since Ali's departure and death she had clothed him in a godlike form little resembling the real man she had married. He had become as the other dead: one of a race apart, partaker of divine qualities, separated forever from the human frailties that had surrounded him in life. Why had she married Ali in the first place? She realized now that she had been too young to know anything of love; she had only hoped that Ali would find her pleasing to look at. Custom had dictated her marriage. That same custom, ancient as Islam itself, was only urging her to follow its dictates now. Why seek any other reason? Why should love enter the picture? That she had learned to love Ali was due to his kindness, his gentleness to a young girl blossoming into a woman. Now it would be different. She would be marrying for security, for financial security for herself and her children. Perhaps another child would follow — she turned the possibilities over in her mind and admitted that she would like one, only one more baby to wipe out the memory of the sin committed so long ago.

Day after day Esmat listened to Naneh's remarks in favor of the match. Her mother came and talked for a long time on the disadvantages of being a widow with three children. " It is the custom; it always has been thus in Iran," she said. " Mohammed was wise in his provision for women; his veil protected them from insults, and you see that women are wearing it again; he granted several wives to one man because he knew the nature of man is polygamous. You know this is true. For the sake of your children you must remarry now you have the chance. Nosrat is a good man who will care for you wisely. Don't be foolish and turn him away as you did when you were a little girl." Her mother's face assumed the stern look which she had always worn when she scolded her children.

Esmat realized that, even though she was a mature woman,

she still feared her mother and she still did not dare to disobey her. Yet she felt that the older woman did not understand, and told her so. They quarreled again, and her mother went home to complain about Esmat to her father.

After she had cooled down, Esmat went to her father, who stroked his hennaed beard and refused to take sides. " You are old enough to know your own mind. You must make this decision yourself."

" He wants me because of my skill in weaving, because I am clever in making changes in designs. But how can I give up my freedom and become a *havoo?* " she asked him. He shook his head sadly as he repeated what he had said before: " You must decide for yourself. It is your life."

That night she got down the Bible the Ostad had sent her and hunted for the passage that she remembered so vividly. The children were asleep beside the *cursie* near her; its warm covers were well pulled up under her arms for it was winter. The recently installed electric light, hanging on its cord from the ceiling, burned brightly as she turned the pages.

Did not Soroor say Solomon had a thousand wives? she thought. *Who better than he could answer my question?*

So she read on and on until she came to the end of the book of Proverbs. The essay on the virtuous woman satisfied her. *I do all those things; I am like that woman. I do not need a man at all,* she thought as she finally closed the book.

The following day Mansur and Soroor approached her again. " Finances are difficult for women alone," her brother-in-law said. " Aga Nosrat is a capable businessman who will manage your money and property. Your father is too old, and I do not have the time."

" Now you have sold my rug, I do not need more money," declared Esmat. " Besides, I managed while Ali was in prison."

" You had your father-in-law to help you," said Soroor. " The future is uncertain these days: prices of rugs may decline; investments may fail, as you know from the Motavali's losses — then what will you do? "

Esmat looked at her as she stood in the doorway. *Her baby will come before long,* she thought in surprise. *How quickly*

time passes!

Suddenly she felt a pang of envy. Why should Soroor have all the babies? If she married for only a few months, maybe she would be able to forget the baby she had destroyed in the joy of a living one. *I'll ask father about temporary marriages — if I could divorce him when I tired of him* — she thought.

The next day she sought her father. When he understood what was in her mind, he replied dryly, " If a Moslem wants two wives, he may have them; if he wants to put one aside, he may; but no woman can obtain a divorce from her husband just because she is tired of her contract."

" But that is not fair. If I work for him and do all he asks me to, and wish to dissolve the marriage, I ought to be able to! "

Her father shook his hennaed head, pulled his dyed beard thoughtfully. " You may be clever, but the law is all on the side of the man in this case. It is not possible for me to protect you as I did when you were a virgin. I insisted on the return of your dowry, if you remember."

Esmat did remember. Now she understood how slim were her bands of matrimony — thin threads of gold only, linking her and her husband together. Yet this time she was considering a marriage where the gold must come from her husband, and if he tired of the agreement, the law was all on his side.

She returned from her visit unhappy, because she knew her father must be correct. But she wanted to verify the law herself — what did the Koran actually say? Turning to her copy, she found the section referring to divorce and polygamy. Although she read and reread the verses, she found no comfort in them. Her father was right; there was no hope for a woman, according to the laws of Islam. Then she thought again of the Book of the Christians. What was it her friend Shamsi had said once? — monogamy and Christianity went hand in hand, while polygamy and Islam were inseparable. She stood silent, thoughtful; her eyes grew dark and large as she questioned the value of her inherited religion.

But she brushed aside any serious consideration of either religion when she recalled the gossip she had heard so often

about the prevalence of divorce among Christians. Evidently in practice many married couples were as promiscuous as the Mohammedans. Yet her father had had only one wife, and her father-in-law, so far as she knew, seemed never to have taken a second either.

Over the neighboring wall she heard a baby crying. Her thoughts flew again to Soroor and her expected child. And in that moment she suddenly made up her mind. She would marry Nosrat; she would have another child.

Mansur and Soroor made the arrangements for the two to meet. This was quite a different matter from the supervision of weaving and now, with downcast eyes, shyness in every line of his figure, Nosrat discussed briefly the problems that were evident. He agreed to finance Esmat and her children in their own home while she assisted him with his designs, supervising some of the workers under his direction, and doing what other odd jobs he wanted to entrust to her. When he departed they had decided that the contract be drawn up and the marriage planned for the coming spring — six weeks from then, just six weeks before the New Year.

Even with everything thus arranged, Esmat did not commit herself irrevocably until the day she saw Soroor's tiny baby boy for the first time. Nor did she realize that the wee hands of her nephew were beckoning her into this untried path. Instead, she told herself: " Mother insists on it. She says it is the custom in Iran, and women must follow the custom."

CHAPTER 27

AGA NORSAT NAGHSHE-KESHI AND ESMAT WERE MARRIED BEfore Nooruz. Esmat decided that there would be no foolish extravagance about this marriage during wartime. The Mujtahid, her mother, and a few close friends came to offer congratulations, but the days of huge banquets had vanished when sugar and flour were rationed. The children, who had long known and liked the quiet little man, seemed not to notice that he did not return to his own home that night, and in the morning he had slipped away before they awoke. Esmat had also risen early and, her required ablutions promptly completed, went about her work in the weaving room.

But Effat was weary of weaving and teased her mother to go visiting. Esmat was annoyed. "You are too big to waste all your time that way. Why, when I was your age I was married!"

"Why don't you let me marry now? I'm willing."

Esmat was shocked. "You have no dowry."

"I have my rugs, and we can buy the other things."

"You are only a child! You are scarcely sixteen!"

"I don't care; I'm big enough, and that is what counts, not years. You said so yourself when the woman next door let her daughter marry. She was only thirteen."

"That's true," admitted her mother. "But you are not of that class. You don't need to marry to keep out of the *kuchehs!*"

"I don't care if I don't need to; there's nothing to do here." She climbed up on the plank beside her mother. "Let me go away to a home of my own," she begged.

Her mother compromised with her. "I have just begun to weave; let me work a couple of hours, then we will plan your

dowry. It won't hurt to think about that anyway."

Effat agreed. Several hours later the two sat beside the brass-bound boxes that had contained Esmat's wedding necessities, planning what linens and quilts Effat would need when, someday in the distant future, she left her mother's home. As they put the articles back, Esmat said: "How much money it would take to buy these things today! It is a good thing I still have most of the money from the sale of my rug. It will take at least a third of it to outfit you properly."

When Nosrat returned the next time, he found the family eagerly planning the household necessities for a bride. He was surprised, but said nothing until Esmat asked him for household money later in the evening.

He handed her a few bills. "You still have plenty from the sale of your rug, do you not?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied. "But I am keeping it for Effat's dowry. Also I have decided that it will be well to send Ali Naqi to school in Teheran in the fall — he is too big to run the streets."

"That is true. To whom will you send him?"

Esmat told him about the Ostad's offer, adding: "I sent word to him I would not consider it unless he permitted me to pay all his expenses. Now I have sold my rug, I have remarried, and I can provide for my son even if he lives in Teheran."

Nosrat was greatly disturbed as he left his second wife's home the following morning. Things were not working out as he had planned. It was one thing to support Esmat and the children in Kashan, quite another to finance a schoolboy in Teheran. Furthermore, his first wife, Forough, was causing him trouble. She had laughingly agreed to a second wife, but when she had learned that Esmat was the woman, and properly married to him, she was furious and declared she would make her *havoo*'s life miserable.

What had gone wrong? Could it be that polygamy was outdated? Or was it that Kashan was different from the larger cities, where, he had heard, a man could manage two separate establishments without conflict? Well, time would tell. He remembered the alterations in the design Esmat had worked on.

She had talent, undoubtedly, but what about her words when he had justifiedly protested against mounting expenses? " *Tau bibinam — tau bibinam!* I will see! " he said as he walked to his office.

A few months later, Ali Naqi was sent to Teheran. When word got about that Effat had begun work on her dowry, offers of marriage were plentiful. Esmat scorned most of them, and practiced procrastination in her decision concerning the others. Her father agreed with her; since Effat was so young, there was no need to hurry.

With the assistance of the girls and the women servants, Esmat finished one pair of rugs. Weaving the design of the past had given her a certain peace. It was the only time in her day when she did find peace, for Forough, Nosrat's first wife, had carried out her threat. Each day some servant or child brought a warning that if Esmat did not leave Nosrat before the next year had elapsed horrible things would occur — poisoned food for the family, a murder some night in the dark lane, acid burns that would make Effat or Parvin undesirable for marriage — on and on through the category of horrors which centuries of polygamy had taught jealous wives in Iran.

At first Esmat had laughed at the bearers of such threats. But as the months of the first year of their marriage drew to an end, she awoke to reality. Her vague schemes to help Nosrat obtain more money from certain villages which he owned had availed nothing; money for Effat's dowry was slow in accumulating; she needed her reserve to finance Ali Naqi for the coming year and the summer at the boys' camp in Manzarieh which the Ostad had recommended; her husband shared his attentions justly, yet no baby was coming.

" What have I done? " she queried of herself. She enumerated her virtues, yet back of it all, in the echo of the past that so often seemed like the voice of the present, she heard the warning voice of her conscience: " You are not so wise after all. You have been foolish — you were thinking only of yourself when you married; you thought only of yourself when you refused to go with Ali but went to that doctoress instead."

She put her thoughts aside refusing to admit even to herself

that she was the one to blame. Yet it was long before she gave up hope, before she realized with certainty that she had lost the power of giving another child to the world. That knowledge crept into all her being, making her nervous and irritable, giving her a new sense of frustration, a feeling of aimlessness in her life.

It was late in February, the month of Bahman, and a cold wind was blowing across the desert, bringing the dust and chill of winter into the city of Kashan. Nosrat Naghshe-Keshi sat under the warm *cursie* in the family room of his *havoo,* studying the work Esmat had recently completed, while she busied herself with a letter to Ali Naqi. Effat was there too, absorbed in the intricate drawn work for a table cover, and Parvin, busily knitting a sweater, completed the family group. Finally Nosrat looked up and said to Esmat, " You have done excellent work with these."

A pleased smile lighted her face. " Thank you for saying that. Sometimes I have wondered if you — " She did not finish her sentence for Effat had looked up from her embroidery.

But Nosrat understood what she wanted to say. " No, I have not regretted it. From a business standpoint it has been a success." He listened a moment to the cold wind roaring outside. It was warm here, and pleasant. Then he added: " There are a good many of these designs to check. I am glad this is my night here again."

Esmat turned to Parvin. " Tell Naneh to bring the water pipe for the aga. Remind Fati to cover the hot dishes well when she brings them up for our supper. We will send her word when we want it."

She went on with her writing, with no further comment, for she knew that he did not like interruptions. Naneh brought the water pipe, its bowl of freshly laid coals glowing. Nosrat took the pipe as Naneh set the bowl on the low stool beside him, inhaled the mild tobacco fragrance, then let the bubbles roll back into the water. A sense of contentment augmented his interest in the work which he resumed.

Into the silence that followed, a loud knock on the garden

door dropped like a stone in a well and everyone looked up in startled surprise. They listened to Naneh complaining loudly as she went to the door. " *Ya Khoda! Ya Ali!* Someone would come this cold night — the gardener off and my knees aching as if all the devils in Jehannum were in them! "

At length they heard the sound of the opening door, then Naneh's usual scream of delight as she welcomed a visitor.

" It is father," said Esmat.

But Effat contradicted her: " No, it isn't his voice! "

Parvin started to rise, but her mother put out her hand restraining her. " Naneh will bring him here, whoever it is. It may be Mansur."

But instead of announcing a member of the family, Naneh came in and exclaimed joyously: " See who has come to see us! *Khoda shokr!* A guest! "

Then Captain Jangju stood in the doorway, smiling at each in turn.

The three women jumped up to greet him, and even Nosrat rose slowly when he saw from their actions that this man was a friend of long standing. " Come in; do come in. It is very cold out tonight," he said.

" Yes," said Parviz. " And I have come a long way — from Shiraz, in fact. With your permission I will warm myself a few moments before I hunt for the home of the chief of police."

" Oh, no! We couldn't let you do that! " Esmat spoke quickly, yet she looked to her husband for confirmation of her implied invitation.

" There is room here," said Nosrat. " And a guest is the kindness of God. We would take it ill if you left us on such a bitter night, to hunt for another place. Let this be as your own house." He was courteous and polite as always.

So Parviz Jangju shed his warm army overcoat and joined the group around the warm charcoal *cursie*. Naneh brought him a tray with a teapot and sugar and a small glass of tea, and Nosrat offered him the tip of the water pipe, but after a few whiffs, Parviz took out a cigarette, saying, " This is the habit I have acquired on my trips of inspection for the Government."

As Parviz raised his arm, Esmat gave a surprised exclama-

tion — there was a black band sewed on his left coat sleeve. " What has happened that you are wearing mourning? Don't tell me your mother — "

The captain looked down at his arm band. " I forgot you did not know," he said. " No, it is not my mother. My wife died of typhus in Shiraz less than a month ago."

" Your wife — so young! " Esmat's voice broke with the sudden flood of sympathy she felt for him. " I — I have heard of her beauty."

" Typhus is no respecter of youth or of beauty," Nosrat remarked. " But it must be very sorrowful to return to Teheran without her."

" It is. We were married only a short time, but she was my first cousin, and I had known her and respected her for a long time." He was silent.

Esmat, looking down at her pen which she was twisting and turning nervously, thought: *It is just two years. You were married, they told me, when I came back to Kashan with Ali — after he was released* — Aloud she said: " Much has happened in the past two years. My own husband was killed — and I have remarried — "

There was a brief moment of silence, then Parviz explained his visit to them by telling of a recent letter from his mother. " She had mentioned that you were living here again and asked me to tell you that she had seen your son recently and that he looked very well and happy." He looked around the group, then once again at Effat. " Your children are growing nicely," he added. " You have a young lady as a daughter, I see."

Effat blushed rosily at his remark. Her mother, watching her, said in surprise: " So she is! My little girl is almost grown up! "

At that point Naneh, interrupting, announced that their supper would get cold. When they returned to sit under the *cursie,* Nosrat questioned Parviz about his work. What was his future assignment — was he to return to Shiraz?

" You have heard of how misfortune travels in threes — I have had my trio. Because of it I am not to return to Shiraz — I have been assigned to inspection work in and about Teheran,"

Parviz replied.

" Bad luck? You have told us of one instance; what are the others? " It was Nosrat who asked him, but Parviz looked at Esmat and her daughters as he answered.

" It is a long tale, and a sad one."

" Tell us! " begged Parvin.

" Yes, tell it to us. Whatever has happened to you is of interest to us," Esmat said quickly.

So Parviz told a tale she could never forget, a tale as unreal as the ones of *The Arabian Nights* of Bagdad.

" I was assigned to inspect the army installations, look over the supplies in the province of Fars, and assist in the collection of taxes if necessary, even to observe the actions of the gendarmery and report whether they were faithful in their protection of travelers. You see it was quite an order they gave me, and I was told to prepare to spend the winter in that area.

" You know it is usually very pleasant in Shiraz and my wife had never visited there. I thought it would be a pleasant change for her, so I asked permission to bring her with me."

He sighed, then continued sadly: " How little we know of the future! How happy she would be now if I had left her in Teheran and were returning to her — "

" Kismet! It was her kismet to meet death in Shiraz — " Esmat spoke and added: " Just as it was Ali's to be killed in Mecca. One cannot change one's kismet."

Parviz shook his head sadly. " Perhaps you are right. Anyway I took her with me to Shiraz, where we rented a small garden not far from the English hospital. She had learned some English, and since she had begun nurse's training in the mission hospital in Tabriz before our marriage, she volunteered to help the nurses. She made many friends there, was very happy and busy even while I was away for some days.

" I carried out my orders successfully for some time. Usually the Government doctor went with me, for it was his duty to vaccinate the women and children and examine their eyes for trachoma, and to inspect the general health of the tribes in the mountains. Sometimes the bankman, assigned to the collection of taxes, went along also, and since we three, with our

baggage, made a carful, we drove together much of the time in one of the Government automobiles.

" One day we started out early, as usual, and had gone about sixty miles from Shiraz when we noticed a barrier of big boulders across the road. The valley was narrow at this place, and it was impossible to circumvent the huge rocks, so we got out to push them away.

" Suddenly a dozen armed men leaped from behind the boulders and surrounded us. They ordered us to put up our hands and stand together at one side of the road. As we moved to obey them some of the bandits recognized the doctor and called him by name. One of the men pulled him to one side and said: ' We don't want to kill you — you are our friend. You have helped our women and children — '

" Another one said, ' That man — ' and he pointed his gun at the banker — ' that man takes our money away from us; he demands taxes from us! Well, he won't get any more. We shall kill him today — ' They forced him to move, pricking him with their bayonets when he stumbled. He grabbed my hand and we kept each other from falling as we moved to the spot they indicated.

" Then the bandits paced off a distance, and aimed at the banker, who fell with his body riddled with bullets. As he fell, fear made my own heart stop beating and I dropped in a faint, unconscious, beside him."

Esmat, her face white, stared at Parviz. In horrified imagination she saw him lying on the stony desert, saw the blood flowing from the wounds of the banker. Scarcely daring to whisper, she breathed, " Tell us — tell us what happened! "

Parviz looked at her with a half-smile. " You see they did not kill me. While I lay there, the doctor begged for my life. As I regained consciousness, I heard him say: ' Do not kill him; he is not your enemy; he has come to help you, to inspect the work of the Government, to see that all is well in your province. Anyway, you see he is ill or he would not have fainted. It is bad luck to kill a sick man. Besides, he is your brother, a fellow Mohammedan — you should not kill a sick Moslem! '

" I heard the reply from one of the leaders: ' How do we know this? Prove it! If you can prove it to us we will not kill him! '

" The spirit of chance had caught them — all the tribes of Iran delight in games of chance, you know. They said to the doctor: ' We know you have treated our women and children; you wish us well. We will grant you the life of your friend as a bonus if you can prove to us he is a Mohammedan.'

" I scarcely dared breathe. Then I felt him fumbling at my coat sleeve, pushing it up and pulling down my shirt sleeve until he found what he was searching for — the cuff links he had sent me when he visited Kerbela. ' Here is the proof! ' I heard him cry out: ' These links are made from the clay of the holy place; they bear the sacred seal of Islam. You are Moslems, you are Shiites! All such are brothers! You would not kill your brother! It is bad luck to kill a sick man! '

" Each of them looked at my cuff links, eying his proof soberly, weighing its value slowly. Finally they granted him my life as a gift. They even poured water on my face to restore me, though they would not give the dying banker any, poor fellow! His agonies must have been terrible — but they would not let the doctor help him.

" When I had recovered from my fainting spell, they forced the doctor and me to walk before them up the stony mountainside into a cave. They barricaded the entrance with boulders and left us there alone.

" We heard them going back down the mountain, then silence again — silence that wound all about us, shutting us up in its dark folds — until we heard the sound of an approaching bus. The bus stopped at the barrier, just as we had — and we heard the cries and pleas of a dozen people — cries that were interrupted by shots until silence reigned once more. The silence grew in horror and loneliness, and fear gripped us again, a fear that finally drove us to tear down the rocks stone by stone. Our fingers bled and sweat poured from our bodies, but fear drove us into the dark of the night, where we fled from shadow to shadow until we reached Shiraz and safety — water and food and safety."

" That was pretty awful," said Nosrat sympathetically. " I have heard of the incident — the bandits killed the entire bus load of passengers."

" Yes — men, women, and children. They did not leave anyone to identify them afterward. Except me — the doctor and me. And we dare not."

" Thank God you reached Shiraz safely! " said Esmat.

" When I arrived, I learned that my wife had been taken to the hospital, a patient herself. The week before she had been helping in the clinic and saw a louse on her wrist. She killed it, but she did not tell the doctor. He might have given her the new preventive hypodermics to protect her, for they had them there. She died the next day — "

" That is two of the three misfortunes. What was the third? " Again it was Nosrat who led the guest on with his tale.

" I hesitate to tell you — you might not understand." Parviz paused. " But with your consent I will; perhaps you can help me. When my wife died, I was in a terrible condition. Sorrow and mourning in addition to the horrible experience I had been through drove me almost crazy. I could not sleep and I became a patient myself under the care of the mission doctor, too ill to care whether I lived or died.

" And one thing bothered me greatly which I felt in some way I must clarify. You see, even though I wore the gift the doctor had brought me from Kerbela, I valued the cuff links for friendship's sake, not as emblems or symbols of my religion. For I went to the Christian schools when I was a boy and long ago came to believe that Christ is my Leader. I have proved to myself that when Jesus said, ' Follow me,' and I did so, he surrounds me with a force that sustains me from evil, strengthens me in times of temptation — I become a better man. That is the same idea which radiates itself in the lives of devotion of its missionaries, in my own mother's affection, for this is what she believes too. I tried it and learned from experience that He did make a difference in my thinking, and ultimately in my actions. Nevertheless, even though I followed Christ's injunction, I did not let those with whom I worked know about my beliefs. I felt now I had been actually dishonest and that my friend

the doctor had saved my life believing me to be what I was not — a Moslem. My conscience told me I had been saved by a lie; I had been taught that no good ever comes from a lie. I could not decide what to do. It is indecision that drives men insane, they tell me, and I know what they mean by that now." He stopped speaking.

Esmat said slowly, as if each word were causing her pain, " Do you mean you are a member of the church of the Christians? "

" In my mind and spirit, yes. Actually I have not been baptized but I don't think that makes any real difference in my Christianity." He turned to Nosrat. " Knowing that, would you prefer I go away now? I thank you for your hospitality this evening."

But Nosrat made a clicking sound with his tongue and his lips, signifying negation. " Christian or Moslem, Jew or Buddhist, I would not send anyone away on such a cold night! But it is time we retired. We can talk more in the morning." He rose and conducted Parviz to the room which had been prepared for the guest.

" Mother," said Parvin earnestly. " You don't think a Christian is unclean, do you? "

" You must go to bed, both you girls! It is far too late." Esmat did not know how to answer Parvin's question.

But Parvin insisted. " Tell me! Is he really unclean? "

" Your grandmother says — " Esmat reached back to her childhood teachings. " Your grandmother says everyone except a Moslem is unclean — *najjess!* "

Effat, standing near the mirror, turned toward her mother and sister. " He is a brave man, I think he is wonderful! " Her voice broke with the intensity of her feelings.

Esmat looked from her excited younger daughter to her usually calm one. She was surprised to see her eyes dark with emotion. She thought: *What has happened to Effat?* But Parvin was speaking again and she heard her say: " Mother! Grandmother would not have sent our Captain Jangju away because he was unclean! "

Still wondering about Effat, Esmat replied: " Both of you

are too excited tonight. Go to bed. Stop talking! Of course she would be polite to a *guest* — "

Yet when the girls had retired and she herself was in bed, the tales of the evening drove sleep far from her. Over and over them she went, trying to decide what she herself would have done. At length she forgot it all by planning a lunch for the captain's journey on the morrow. And the delicacies she could send to her son with him!

They sat down to breakfast early so their guest could start as soon as the car arrived. As they were eating, Nosrat said to Parviz: " You did not tell us what the doctors did for you. They must have helped you or you would not be able to travel."

" Oh, yes. They gave me sleeping drugs, built me up until my nerves were rested. Then they advised me to do just what I did last night."

" And what was that? "

" Confess. Confess my beliefs to anyone interested enough to inquire how God helped me out of my troubles." The knocker on the door sounded. " There is my car! I must go! "

They followed him to the garden gate, wishing him Godspeed on his journey and Nosrat urged him to come again if ever he passed that way.

As he got in the car, Parviz turned toward Esmat. " You have been kind to me; may you think kindly of me in the future. *Khoda barakat bidi!* May God bless you! " The car moved down the lane, then disappeared.

Nosrat gathered up his designs and left too.

Effat picked up the embroidery she was working on the evening before, yet she did not begin it. Instead she looked with dreamy eyes across the garden toward the door where their guest had so recently stood.

Esmat said to her: " Stop your daydreaming, Effat. Do your sewing! " To Parvin she said: " I've been thinking about your question. The captain's life was saved by a Moslem, and I am a Moslem. Mother would tell me to turn him over to the authorities on his own confession."

" But you would not do that! " said Parvin.

Effat spoke slowly. " He is a brave man; he would not mind;

he would find an answer for them."

Esmat laughed uncertainly. "I believe you are right. But no, I could not do that anyway." Nor in spite of the shock his confession had given her, could she ever think of him other than kindly, she knew.

CHAPTER 28

TOWARD THE END OF MARCH, THE MONTH OF FARVARDIN, NOSrat Naghshe-Keshi received an offer of an excellent position in the Government School of Art in Teheran. He said nothing to Esmat until he had made all his plans. But he told Forough of his decision to take her and his family to Teheran. He might as well have told Esmat at once for Forough lost no time in informing her enemy via the servants' rumor route that she was leaving and that Esmat was to be divorced.

Actually Nosrat had not yet reached that decision. Nevertheless, he had gone to see Mansur who had been the go-between before the marriage. "Perhaps you have heard of my offer in Teheran," he said. "I will be leaving soon. The company has asked me to recommend a successor. I thought possibly you could be general overseer and superintendent. Naturally they want a man for that work." He paused a moment, then added: "I will not be able to send Esmat money from Teheran; my expenses will be too heavy there. It is better she have work for herself which will care for her own needs. So I recommended her to be the supervisor of the women who are weaving for the company. She has helped me so much she knows the work well."

Mansur rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Have you told Esmat? What did she say? Did she agree to this work? I have had no experience in the weaving end and if she is not willing to do this I would not want to be the overseer for the company."

Nosrat replied: "No, I have not told her yet, I will speak to her later. She is a clever woman who will readily recognize what a fine opportunity it is."

That afternoon Nosrat called at Esmat's garden. He ex-

amined the new designs that she had been working on, complimented her work, and said that she would easily be able to support herself when he left for Teheran.

For once she was unable to comprehend the full meaning of his remark. She waited until he should have said more, but he turned aside to leave, saying as he did so that he had much packing to supervise before he left. Esmat, surprised by his sudden departure, had stood watching him until the garden door closed behind him. Then she turned back into the room and noticed a paper lying on the table. She picked it up and opened it, gave a low moan as she realized it was the first of the divorce notices which rumor had told her she would receive. " He does not want me any more," she whispered. " O God! What shall I do now? "

The next day she sought her father, the Mujtahid, but he could offer her no consolation. " If a Moslem wants two wives, he may have them; if he wants to turn one aside, he may."

" But it is not fair! I have done nothing. I have worked on his designs, I have given him many new ideas. He says I am a clever woman."

Her father shook his hennaed head, pulled his red beard thoughtfully. " You were not clever enough to hold your man," he remarked. " No, the law is all on the side of the man in such a case."

Uncomforted, Esmat returned to her home to find the second of the divorce papers awaiting her. She knew the customs — her only recourse now would be to try to persuade Nosrat to change his mind. The thought of being a divorced woman frightened her; such women were always looked upon askance by the men of her city and belittled by the women of her acquaintance. She would go to Nosrat — if need be, she would humble herself in order to escape such a fate.

On the following day she went to his business offices, a place she had never entered before. It happened he was busy with an official of the company, and he sent word that he could not see her. Disappointed, Esmat went home and wrote him a letter, asking him to reconsider the matter and offering to undertake more work for him.

No answer came until Nosrat himself appeared the following day to bid her a courteous farewell, since he was departing the next day for Teheran. He laid the third and last paper of divorce on the table, cutting off Esmat's protest by saying, " I cannot afford two wives, one here and one there," then rose to go.

Esmat spoke quickly, " But you need my help, my wisdom."

" On the contrary," he replied, " I need a housewife and the mother of my children. Wisdom I will find in the school of designs, in the work of our ancient masters."

He left at sunset, quietly, calmly, determined on his course, without mentioning the possible position for Esmat. Since he was not certain his recommendations had been accepted by the inspector, he decided it was better not to raise her hopes.

Esmat picked up the final divorce paper as she heard the door of the garden close and read it carefully to see if there could be an error in it, some loophole of escape. But no! It was correct. It seemed to her that shadows were creeping into the room: shadows of Ali who had left her when he learned of her sin; shadows haunted by her tiny dead baby; shadows of all her mistakes. She felt hemmed in, suffocated.

Throwing down the paper, she rushed outside and climbed the steep steps to the flat mud roof. Effat and Parvin saw her and followed.

Running to the edge of the roof Esmat flung her arms wide. " What shall I do? Alone! Buried alone in Kashan! " she cried in agony.

Her elder daughter walked fearfully, slowly, toward her mother. " Mother, dear, *mader jon,*" she began softly.

Like one in a dream, Esmat's arms dropped slowly as she turned and stared in surprise at the girls.

" But I am not alone! Not yet! " she cried as she held out one hand to them while she pointed with the other to the city below. " Look at Kashan! See the houses, the homes of the men of Kashan! See them hugging each other, wall to wall, roof to roof! Do you see them, girls? "

" Of course," said Parvin. " We often come here."

" There is nothing surprising in this," said the prosaic Effat.

" They have always been thus."

" Yes," agreed her mother. " They have always been thus. Each one has always been some man's home. Some man with some woman." She thought of her dead husband and his unfaithfulness and added: " A man wants a woman who will change when he changes. And he wants children — " She stopped as she remembered Ali's words, " You need not kill my children." It would not do to think of the past. She thought of Nosrat instead. *But he does not want his woman to give him advice,* she thought, *no matter how valuable! or even wisdom! He wants peace in his home and self-respect. He wants love and happiness.*

In the street below, camels came slowly out of the dusty *kucheh,* bells swinging, ringing monotonously as they had for thousands of years. As they turned from the narrow lane into the wider avenue, the electric lights of the city flashed on, marking their course as far as eye could see. Far beyond, the amber desert blended its dusty yellows with the gray rose of the sunset. Esmat stood listening, absorbed in the beauty of the evening, the sounds of the vanishing bells, the peace of Kashan.

But the girls had had enough of the familiar scene. " It's cold," said Effat.

" Let's go down," said Parvin. " I hear someone coming."

When they reached the bottom step, the knocker on the door sounded. Parvin rushed ahead to open the door. " It's baba *jon!* " she cried joyously, flinging herself on her grandfather, who returned her eager embrace.

The Mujtahid looked over the head of his granddaughter into Esmat's face, reading her disappointment and discouragement, noting her listlessness. " I came to take you and the girls to our house for supper; you are working too hard," he said.

" We shall be glad to," said Esmat. " Let me tell the servants and I will be ready in a moment."

In Esmat's girlhood home, her daughters, as usual, found much to interest them in their grandmother's rooms, but at a sign from her father Esmat followed him into his study. She

stood idly watching him as he seated himself and began to smoke the water pipe, then she sat down near his bookshelves.

" I hear Nosrat is to leave for Teheran in the morning," he said.

" Yes, he told me so." Pride would not let her say more.

" He has given you the third paper of divorce? " It was a statement rather than a question. Her silence was the answer he expected, for he continued: " I foresaw it a long time ago. You were never made for a *havoo.*"

Esmat found her tongue at last. " Mother insisted I do it."

" I know, I know. Your mother clings to the past. She does not realize how your years in Teheran changed you." He paused, then continued: " You are not like your mother — you never were, though you used to try to copy her faithfully. I asked you to come here tonight because I have a request to make of you."

Esmat, steeled for a lecture, had not expected this. " You want me to do something for you? What is it? If I can, I will, certainly."

" You can, you can, my daughter. I am getting to be an old man; I want you to grant me one request you may think very strange. Do you see that shelf of books beside you? "

Esmat turned to the familiar shelf. " These? Your books on religion? They look very difficult."

" They are, but I want you to consider yourself a student again. Each month I want you to find time to read one or more of these; when you have finished them all, come to me and tell me which you think contains the truth."

Esmat looked at her father. *He is an old man,* she thought. *I must do this for him.* She recalled her last lessons from him, lessons in village supervision, but she also sensed his love, his desire to help her now. " They don't look very interesting, but I'll do it for you, if you wish," she said.

" You will not be interested at first, but if you read seriously you will be. Will you promise to do this? "

" I promise," she said simply.

" There is another thing: the men from the rug company have asked me if you would consider being their supervisor, the

inspectress of weaving and designs in Kashan. They think a man should be their general supervisor in place of Nosrat, and have asked Mansur to do it. Do you think you can be the inspectress? Nosrat recommended you."

Whether it was the familiar surroundings or her father's gentle sympathy or the utterly unexpected remark he had just made that touched Esmat's heart to the quick, she never knew. But tears sprang to her eyes and she wept silently, touched beyond measure by her father's understanding of her problems.

The Mujtahid let her weep awhile, then said: " You can do it; you know you can. You are capable enough."

Her voice was low. " I might make many mistakes — I am afraid a woman will find it very difficult."

" Yes, it will be hard, but we will help you. They will interview you tomorrow morning, and Mansur and I will be with you."

In the morning the men came and her father and brother-in-law were present to help and encourage Esmat. They insisted on a contract so that she would be protected and not be required to do more than was possible. The company's representatives urged Mansur and Esmat to speed up production as much as was humanly possible in order that the unprecedented demand of the war years might be met and high prices obtained for the excellent rugs of Kashan.

When the men finally left, they handed her the brief case full of designs which Nosrat had been accustomed to carry. " There are new ones here, as well as those that have been begun. We wish you good luck and good-by."

Her father and Mansur accompanied them down the lane and Esmat turned back to her house. She said to her daughters, who had listened eagerly to much of the conversation, " Let us look at the designs before we go to bed."

As she laid the pile on the table, she pushed aside the white paper of her final divorce, which fell on the floor. Effat picked it up. " What is this paper? Do you want it, mother? " she asked.

Esmat glanced at it, sighed in remembrance of her recent failure, then gave a short laugh. " It's no good, tear it up. I

don't want it mixed with these things."

One by one she examined the new designs, commenting on each to her daughters as she visualized in the cross sections of design the finished rugs, silken sheen, perfect colors, ready to be baled to send to the merchants. In a flash of memory, she even imagined them lying on the floors of the rich homes in foreign countries which she had seen in the cinema in Teheran long ago.

Near the bottom of the pile, she uncovered a design of a face. "Another picture rug! How I dislike them! Let's see who wants his likeness woven into a Persian rug."

"It's not a man," said Parvin, as she laid one cross section on the table. A pair of child's eyes stared up at them.

"No," agreed her mother. "Here is the hair, like a halo about the face."

"And the ears and the chin," said Effat, putting two of the designs in place.

Eagerly the girls helped their mother complete the puzzle of the design. At last it lay on the table, a child's face staring at them through the bars of the cross section.

"*Ajab!* How surprising!" they said, simultaneously. "It's a child! A boy!"

"Let me weave it, mother," pleaded Parvin.

"Do you know who it is?" asked Effat.

Esmat gathered the pieces together. "Just a child. I've seen it before. Some Christian ordered it, I suppose. They call it the Christ-child, but faces like that should never be woven in rugs."

She turned to another design. "Now this one — look at it, girls! See the skill needed for this intricate bit of design. I'll have to supervise it carefully or the weaver will bungle it. It's one of Iran's old, old designs."

Effat followed her mother's slender finger, her comments, but Parvin gathered the pieces of the child design from the pile before her mother. "Let me weave this one," she begged.

Esmat had finished her examination of the contents of the brief case and began putting the designs back.

"I want to weave this one," Parvin repeated.

" Give it to me," said her mother.

Parvin backed away from her mother's outstretched arm. " Promise me you'll let me weave it."

Effat took her sister's side. " Let her do it, if she wants to. It's an easy rug to weave."

" You're right," agreed Esmat. " It's too easy; just a little border, a little face, lots of plain blue background."

" Then you'll let me! " cried Parvin.

" If you want to. You'll get tired of it, but if you begin it you'll have to finish it."

Parvin, her wish granted, did not listen to her mother's warning. " I'm going to bed," she said sleepily.

" We're all going," said Esmat as she closed the case of designs. " We have real work for tomorrow."

CHAPTER 29

PARVIN WAS A CHILD OF WHIMS, OF VAGARIES, OF SUDDEN FANcies. She was like the wagtails playing about the pools: here one second, there another. Naneh declared that Parvin's untimely entrance into the world was the cause of her volatile nature. Either that, said she, or the milk on which she had nursed, for everyone knew the milk of a temporary wife who was cross-eyed could not be as good as that of a regular wife. But when they had cut the Koran according to custom, it had decreed that this cross-eyed village woman should be Parvin's wet nurse. Her milk had seemed good, for both her own baby and Parvin had thrived on it, but, said Naneh, one never could tell about milk; it might not have been as good as it seemed. Certainly Parvin had not grown into the gentle, obedient child that her sister was.

For Effat, on the other hand, was dependable. Save for the first few lonely months after she had been taken from Teheran and had wandered around unhappily longing for her schoolmates, Effat had settled down into the groove that Kashan had carved into the rock of custom and habit for its daughters. Effat was a child of routine, methodical, meticulous, anxious only when there was a break in her pattern of life. She imitated her mother in saying the prayers of Islam, wearing the graceful prayer veil, folding it with care when she put it away in its embroidered case. She was even more careful with her own Kerbela prayer seal and the copy of the Koran her grandfather had given her.

Unlike her sister, Parvin was not interested in religion, in routine, in much of anything for long at a time. Again and again Esmat had suggested that she weave a pair of rugs of her own. She would watch, and even help a little now and then,

but she would not undertake any weaving of her own. What was more annoying, she was so stubborn and willful that in the clash of wills between herself and her mother Parvin usually won. But now she had chosen to weave a rug! A picture rug of a child at that! Esmat was annoyed, but she yielded, as usual. The matter was not worth arguing over. As supervisor of designs and weaving, she had to see that someone wove the rug and it might as well be Parvin — one rarely assigned such a rug to the best weavers.

Parvin began her weaving with all the enthusiasm of a beginner, stipulating that since only one rug had been ordered, she be allowed to weave its mate for herself. Contrary to expectations, she really applied herself to her task. In a month she had finished the lower borders and worked steadily on and on, up and up the simple robe that was draped over the shoulders of the boy. Esmat had no criticism to offer until Parvin began to work on the face; then one day she surprised Parvin at her work. " You are doing it wrong," she said. " Let me show you." She seated herself beside her daughter and picked up the face-color strands of wool.

Parvin flared up in anger. " Let me alone! These are my rugs."

Esmat was troubled; this was different from their usual disagreements; this time an order was involved. " No, Parvin. Only one is yours. The other must be like the pattern," she said.

" I don't want it that way. I want it the way I am doing it."

Esmat was firm. " You will follow the pattern or not do it at all. It must be perfect."

" I don't want it perfect. No children are perfect." Parvin's eyes snapped angrily.

Esmat looked at her daughter as though she were a stranger. " What did you say? " she asked wonderingly.

" I said I did not want my rug perfect. I want it different. I want it mine."

" You said something about children — " repeated her mother.

Parvin had turned back to her weaving. " Let me weave it

my own way."

But her mother was sternly severe. "You forget these are not my rugs. I am the supervisor of the company."

"One is mine; you promised me one was to be mine!" Parvin was adamant.

"Yes, one is yours; I bought the wools for you. But the other belongs to the company."

"Take the company rug away, then; I won't weave it unless you let me do mine as I want to."

Her mother was shocked. "You know we can't move the rug frame now it has been started."

Parvin seized her advantage. "Then let me alone to weave mine as I want to." She offered a compromise. "I'll weave the company rug just like the pattern if you promise not to interfere with my own."

Esmat gave up the struggle. "Well — but why you should want to change it, I can't see."

"You changed your rug!"

"I — what do you mean? What rug?"

"You put the bird of God, *Morghe haqq,* in the Tree of Life pattern!" Parvin's voice was triumphant.

The cloud of years lifted and Esmat saw herself seated on the plank inserting the browns of her new bird, her children watching her tie the knots; under the surge of the years beating on her memory she heard again the voice of the designer: "You are right; the Tree of Life pattern needs the bird of truth to complete it."

She was silent. She had indeed changed the pattern; but she had not been very wise in weaving her own pattern of life.

Parvin turned to her work. "I don't want to change it much. The face seems so sad. I want it to smile."

Esmat was relieved. "If that's all you want, I'll help you turn up the corners of the mouth. But, remember! You promised to weave the other exactly like its design."

Parvin was happy again, in spite of the compromise.

That night Esmat sat alone long after the girls were asleep, the designs of Parvin's rug before her. She was trying to alter them so that the mouth and eyes of the sad-faced boy would

smile at her, and thinking of her daughter's words: " I don't want it perfect. No children are perfect — but they should be happy, shouldn't they? " Ali Naqi, with his imperfection — thank God the doctors had cured that! And he was happy too. Parvin was right. She would make the face of the Christ-child a happy one if she could.

Months later, Parvin's rugs were cut from the loom and sheared, under Esmat's direction. At first glance they seemed identical, but under closer examination they were quite different — one was a likeness of a sad-eyed lad of twelve; the other, that of a boy with happy, sparkling eyes and a mouth with the merest suggestion of a smile.

Parvin, forgetful of her years, danced joyously around them. " See how lovely my rug is! My own rug! " She hugged her mother. " He is smiling, mother. He is an angel of light; angels are always happy, aren't they? Take the other one away! "

Esmat picked up the company rug. " You kept your promise anyway. Now you may have your own rug."

" Where may I hang it? "

" Anywhere that suits it. It is so small — it will need a place that frames it."

" Over the mantel? May I hang it over the mantel? "

" If you wish. Naneh will help you."

Day after day, week after week, month after month, the smiling eyes, the slightly turned-up mouth, the shining halo of light drew the attention of everyone who entered the big room.

" What a happy child! " said the women of Kashan. " Who is it? Who wove it? "

And Parvin would answer proudly: " I wove it! He is the Christ-child and my mother made him smile! "

At first Esmat seemed not to notice the comments of the women, but their unvarying repetition and Parvin's answer at length set her to thinking about the wisdom of giving such a prominent place to a rug so obviously Christian.

She suggested to Parvin that she put it in her dowry chest for a while, but her daughter was so offended that she said no more about it. She went to consult her father instead.

" You have seen the rug Parvin wove. It disturbs me be-

cause the women seem to think it strange that we have such a rug hanging in our living room. They don't *say* anything, but I sense it; so I told Parvin to take it down but she did not want to — " Esmat hesitated. " She would be very hurt and angry if I insisted because it is the only one she has ever woven all alone and she is so proud of it."

Her father walked the length of the room, returned to the window overlooking the garden where Esmat had played as a little girl. He seemed to see her again, trailing her hand in the pool, stringing yellow jasmine flowers into a necklace, playing with her sister.

" Do you remember the day you chose the design for your first rug? " he asked her finally.

Esmat nodded. " The Tree of Life," she said wondering why he had turned back to her own girlhood.

" Yes — like your mother wove, and your grandmother in Kerman." The Mujtahid paused, then turned to look at his daughter. " In your rugs you have woven many of the old designs of this country, but have you thought how different the design of your life has been from that of your mother and your grandmother? If you could have lived as they did, secluded lives in small towns, quiet lives under the veil of Islam, perhaps you would have been happy in the way that they were, knowing nothing of the world and its problems. But you no longer wear the veil, yet removing it has only increased your seeking and questioning, your longing and hoping for a new day in Iran. You have unconsciously instilled this in your own daughters. Why are you surprised when they want to make the little children smile as Parvin did the face in the rug? "

How well he understands me! thought Esmat. *Always he has seen the reasons behind my worries and pointed the way to me.* " What am I to do? " she asked, and her voice was that of a little girl.

" That question is still one you must answer yourself." He crossed the room and stood before his bookshelves. " Do you recall the promise you made me the last time we talked in this room? "

" I remember it well," she said.

" And have you kept it? Have you read the books I asked you to? "

" No, not yet; I glanced at them, my father, and there was so much in them that I couldn't understand — and I am so very busy this summer — " She cleared her throat and added, " I thought the long nights of winter would be a better time for them — "

The Mujtahid looked down at his hands twisting and turning the Moslem prayer rosary endlessly, habitually; round and round he twisted the cycle of beads — the names of God, of Allah, the Almighty — Allah, *rahmon o' rahim* — Then he spoke, slowly: " Someday when your need is greater, you will be forced to go elsewhere for help. Perhaps you will find it in those books." He stopped, changed the subject. " You asked about Parvin. She is changing, she is growing, she is thinking. Let her! It is a small thing that she asks of you, grant it."

" But the women! " Esmat protested. " How can I answer them? "

He smiled and said: " Remind them of the veil and how some prefer the new way; tell them today in Iran one may even change one's religion! If Parvin likes this new face, let her; it is between herself and God — "

Esmat looked up quickly. " But you are a priest of Islam! If this is correct, why do you continue to preach the Koran as the *only* true way? "

" For that very reason; I am a priest and I know as many do not the history of my religion, its origin, and the reasons for its customs and tenets. I have lived all my life according to it. No, I am too old to change. Besides there is much good in Islam, if men carry out its tenets correctly. But I believe the day has come when men will search for and find a spiritual help to perpetuate its best ethics and traditions. And that force may well be in other religions — " He smiled. " You were forced to unveil, but you are not compelled to remain unveiled; after all the choice is now with you, is it not? "

" Yes," Esmat admitted. " I could never go back to the old ways. I see what you mean. Parvin has a right to her choice too."

So she let the rug hang over the mantel in the reception room and she answered the women who thought it strange to have the likeness of the Christ-child in the home of a Moslem, "The Koran teaches us that Jesus is the Ruh-o-Allah, the Spirit of God."

CHAPTER 30

EVERYDAY, ESMAT, AS THE INSPECTRESS OF DESIGNS, VISITED the looms to check the patterns assigned to the weavers. It was her job to see that as much as possible was accomplished in each hour of daylight, for no weaving could be done at night — colors were too different then. The more rugs she turned over to the company, the greater was her own pay, for she received a premium for each rug completed satisfactorily within a given time. Now that no husband supplemented Esmat's earnings, she pushed her workers to their fullest output and drove herself to earn greater and greater profits. Again she became a woman of determination, just as in the days when she had supervised her father's and Ali's villages.

More than a year had passed since Nosrat had divorced her, and in those long months Esmat had inspected each rug many, many times — she had corrected beginning errors, she had supplied the needed materials and new sections of design when the old ones were discarded. As she advised the weavers, Esmat scarcely noticed the little helpers beside them, busily tying knots. They seemed almost part of the machine, for each adult always had a few child helpers; it was all a necessary part of the big task, especially since speed was essential. The armies of occupation in Iran, pushing supplies from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea for the Allies, were paying unheard-of prices for the hand-woven rugs, but they wanted them quickly.

What riches the fates were offering to the merchants of the land of Darius, the land of the slow-moving camels, and of plodding donkeys! The women to whom time had never been important, who patiently awaited the unfolding of a design in a rug as they awaited the unfolding of life within their own bodies, now tried their utmost to change their rhythm of weav-

ing in order that they too might share in the new riches. This was an opportunity not to be missed, for everyone knew it was a fruit of war which would all too soon be blighted by the hot sun of normal times, when only a few daring tourists would find their way over the barren deserts to the covered bazaars of Kashan.

As the orders from the company increased, Esmat asked herself who wove the fastest. Who turned out the best rugs? Observation provided the answer — Ozra and Jamileh, Akhtar and Nasrine, Khadijeh and Aghdas. It was good to have such women as these — careful, quick, thorough. As the work increased, Mansur recommended hiring the vacant garden of the robber, Nyab Hussein, and setting up extra looms there under the supervision of these women, so that the production of rugs would be even greater. The company had agreed and now the big room resembled a factory as the weaving progressed.

On her daily visits, Esmat urged greater speed. She asked her workers to weave every day of the week, reluctantly permitting an occasional day's holiday. Why, she asked them, if they needed money as they said, should they take time off for baths or recreation oftener than once in fifteen days? They were paid only for the days they worked — what use were holidays?

When word came that Ali Naqi would soon arrive in Kashan for his first visit in two years, however, custom decreed that all the workers be invited for a day of feasting to honor the son of the family. Pride dictated that there be no penuriousness shown on behalf of the inspectress.

Ali Naqi, a tall handsome boy of thirteen, solemnly bowed to the assembled women and children gathered in his honor, then took his seat beside his uncle Mansur. The two talked together in low tones of their experiences in the capital city, glancing occasionally at their guests, and urging them to partake of the treat prepared for them: nuts, fruits, iced drinks, and cakes. They saw that the dishes of rice and meat sauce were served to every person present. It was a grand occasion which reminded everyone of the old days before the war.

Two weeks later the fine banquet, the excitement of Ali

Naqi's return, were forgotten in a new attempt to push production of her rugs. Each day Esmat was away from early morning until noon, busy at her work of supervision.

After two weeks of visiting with his sisters and cousins and the few friends he had in Kashan, Ali Naqi grew surfeited with it all. He complained to his sisters: " There is nothing to do here! Everyone sits around until noon, eats, and then sleeps all afternoon! Then they walk up and down the avenue at sunset; eat and sleep again — what a life! "

" At one time there was a cinema, but they took it away because the people did not like it and would not go," said Parvin.

" No wonder! The films were probably old. I wish it were here now, though, for this place has no life at all." He paused, then continued: " Now last summer I was in the Boys' Camp for Scouts in Manzarieh. What a place! You should have seen the program of work and play we had there! "

" It must have been perfect! " said Effat appreciatively.

But Parvin was weary of hearing of the wonders of the camp.

" Last summer I wove my rug," said she. " Let's go and look at it."

For want of anything better to do, they sauntered into the big room to look again at Parvin's rug. Ali Naqi took the corner, turned it back, and studied the reverse of the pattern a minute. " You wove it tightly. I like it, it's nice," he said.

Pleased at her brother's approval, Parvin made a suggestion. " Let's ask mother if we can go with her on her inspection tomorrow. I would like to see the rugs being woven."

" That might be interesting," said Effat.

But Ali Naqi was really enthusiastic at the idea. " Yes! And we can climb the Minaret on our way home! "

They found their mother in the cool basement room separating the cross sections of designs that had recently been completed from those still being woven. She was seated cross-legged on the floor with the designs in piles before her. Her face was pale and she seemed very weary. " What do you want? " she asked the children impatiently.

Ali Naqi became the spokesman. " I'm tired of doing noth-

ing. I want to go back to Teheran."

Esmat cried in alarm. " You've just come home! Surely you want to stay with us one summer! "

Ali Naqi winked at his sisters. " Then give me something to do! Take us with you tomorrow."

" We want to see your weavers at work," Parvin added.

" We have not seen the work since you moved — " said Effat.

Esmat sat back on her heels and looked uneasily at her children standing in the half-light of the open door. " It will disturb the weavers if you are around. We can't have interruptions these days. See all these to be woven." She pointed with her pencil to the pile closest to her. " Besides I gave them a party when you came. That was enough rest for them! "

" We won't stay long," said Parvin.

" No, we'll go quickly because we want to climb the Leaning Minaret before it gets too hot," said Ali Naqi.

" The Minaret! Whatever made you think of that? " His mother's voice showed the surprise she felt.

" Everybody climbs it; it's something to do," said her son.

His mother, half-closed eyes, pencil in fingers trembling with weariness, studied her children. *If it were Parvin and Effat only, I could order them away,* she thought. *But Ali Naqi is different. He wants to visit the weavers! He wants to climb the Leaning Minaret! And I do not have time to argue with all this work to be done!* Finally she spoke slowly, reluctantly: " Very well. You may watch the weaving tomorrow, but you'll have to ask Ahmad to leave his teahouse and go with you up the Minaret. I do not have time and Naneh is too old."

Ali Naqi laughed. " Ahmad is older than she is! "

" That's all right. He can do it yet. I won't have you climbing that by yourselves. It's dangerous. Now let me alone. I'm very busy." She laid her pencil down to transfer another square of design to a different pile.

Satisfied with their success, the youngsters went out into the sunny garden. " Let's swim," said Ali Naqi as he stood beside the cool-looking pool in the center of their garden.

Parvin made a negative sound between her lips and teeth.

" The water was changed last night; it will be cold."

" Cold! This water cold! " cried her brother. " You should have swum in Manzarieh! That was really cold, coming down from the mountain snows in underground channels until it reached our pool! "

" Go on in yourself, if you want to! I don't. Show me how you dive. I love to watch you."

Ali Naqi, nothing loath to show off his accomplishments, disappeared into one of the first-floor rooms and soon returned clad in swimming trunks. After she saw her brother sporting in the water, Parvin changed her mind. She joined him and tried the new tricks he had shown her. Effat sat with her sewing, watching and laughing at their antics.

Esmat, hearing their shouts of joy and the splashing water, looked out to see them playing happily together. She said to Naneh, who had just come in: " The Ostad has done well by him. He has grown brown and healthy."

Naneh agreed. " You were a wise woman when you sent him away."

Esmat smiled at her woman's compliment. She acknowledged that Naneh was right; it had been her wisdom that had made it possible for Ali Naqi to develop thus. No doubt the Ostad had helped, but hers was the greater credit. Had she not financed him through the first difficult years? Pleased with the contemplation of the past, Esmat turned once more to her task.

Summer days in Kashan begin before sunrise and end at noon, when everyone takes refuge in the cool, underground rooms to sleep until afternoon tea; then they come to the surface like moles, blink at the declining sun, drink their tea, and dress for the promenade up the narrow lanes to the one wide avenue with its dust-covered trees lining its watercourse.

By six o'clock the next morning, Ali Naqi and his sisters were ready to leave the garden. Esmat was ready also, for it was a long, hot walk home if she did not start early. Ahmad had easily been persuaded to shut up his teahouse for the morning hours and accompany them on their jaunt. Business was slow in the summer.

Striding on ahead, Ahmad and Ali Naqi easily outdistanced the others and slowed down when they could see them no longer. As mother and daughters appeared in the distance, they moved on again. When they finally reached the big garden's semicircular entrance way, Ali Naqi climbed up in one of the alcoves of the wall; he talked to Ahmad who stood near him. " How slow they are! Now we men — " Ali Naqi threw out his hands, took a deep breath, and continued: " We men know how to hurry! Women in Kashan are a hundred years behind the times! "

Ahmad smiled quizzically, looked at the boy across from him. " If you said most women, it would be true. Your mother is not."

" Bah! Do you call her up-to-date? She must be forty years old! She has gray hairs! I saw them this morning."

Ahmad looked away remembering when he had first seen Esmat's gray hair. It was the day after word reached him that Nosrat was divorcing her. He conceded the point. " Gray hair, yes; but she is doing the work of a man for the rug company."

Emphatically Ali Naqi contradicted this statement. " The work a man did, not what a man could do now if he were here. No woman can keep up with a man in any field: science, art, literature. They tire too easily. Are they not the weaker sex always? "

" Who told you that? " Ahmad eyed the boy speculatively.

" My teachers in Teheran! Who else knows so much as they do? Here the others come! " Ali Naqi jumped down from his post in the alcove and pounded the knocker on the big wooden door as his mother and sisters appeared around the corner of the wall.

As the door opened they heard the thump! thump! of the weavers in the cool, dark rooms. Nor did the monotonous sound of the many-tined fork with which the knots were pounded in place cease as they entered. The weavers had been scolded so often that they had learned not to stop when visitors came. Hands reached for wool from the balls hanging above, mechanically they slipped and tied the knots, quickly they cut the wool, then stretched up for more and wound it around the

strings of the loom. Over and over they repeated the process until many knots filled the space, then they picked up the fork and pounded them tightly in place. It was always the same: knots, knots! cut, cut, the wool! pound, pound the knots as inch by inch the rugs grew in the dark rooms of the big sun-filled garden.

This time there was a break in the monotony as Ali Naqi, walking beside his mother, said in surprise, " Several children and one master weaver on each rug — is that the idea? "

Pale faces turned toward the light and the sound. They recognized the son of their director who had been so gracious to them at the party in his honor. They stopped work a minute to smile shyly at him.

" See! I told you you would disturb them! They must keep busy; we will never finish if they don't." Esmat spoke to the children and their women weavers: " We just came to see you at work. Continue as usual, I beg you."

They turned back to their weaving while Esmat studied the progress of the design and pointed out to the adult the places where corrections were necessary. Effat watched her mother with interest while Parvin noticed the intricate pattern; Ali Naqi had eyes only for the small workers. " Does that woman always call out the change of color for them? "

" Of course. She is the director."

Parvin asked, " Do they have to work all day? "

" Not all day. Of course they rest an hour or so at noon. Then they work again; they are poor children; the rooms are cool." Esmat sensed something wrong in the minds of her children. She continued: " Children have always woven rugs. Their little hands are quicker and they tie the knots tighter. I wove one; my sister also; Effat wove her pair. Even you have woven one! " She turned defensively to Parvin.

But it was Ali Naqi who spoke in reply: " She didn't have to weave all the time. Anyway, she is a girl. I saw boys there too." Ali Naqi pointed to one closely shaved head near the door. " You are a boy, aren't you? " he asked.

The boy nodded his head.

" How old are you? "

" I don't know — six, seven, eight years." The answer was mumbled.

The grandson of the Mujtahid pronounced judgment. " He is eight; I know he is, even if he is so small. And I'll bet he can't even read his alphabet! "

The woman at the end of the plank spoke. " Read! Certainly he can't read! He can learn to read later when his hands are too big to tie knots. His mother is a widow; she needs his wages for his food."

But Esmat had had enough time wasted from weaving. " Come to another room and let this group settle down to work again. There is a new pattern — a cartoon rug in one room." She enticed them away.

Ahmad, standing silently watching the reactions of the educated lad, added to Esmat's inducements. " If you want to visit the Minaret, we will have to move on to another room or it will be too late to go there."

When they had reached the garden again, Esmat turned to her children. " Now I don't want you to open your mouths when you are in this next room. Remember, this is like a factory, and I am the head here. If you don't promise to be quiet, I will not let you see any more weaving."

The young folks reluctantly agreed to silence. As they started to cross the garden, Ahmad asked Esmat if the ground in the garden had been tested since they opened up their work there.

" What do you mean? Tested for unsafe places? Why, yes. The men went over the yard with a stone roller to see if there were any weak spots."

" There was an old well exposed many years ago."

Esmat replied, " That was way over there." She pointed to a far corner of the garden. " We had all that rubble thrown about it so no one would go near it."

As they walked on, Ahmad said: " This place is full of unsafe spots. It had many underground tunnel exits for the robbers."

Esmat answered: " Mansur was not worried about it. It does not seem dangerous now."

They reached the room where the cartoon rug was being

woven. It caught Parvin's interest and she studied it carefully. After they had gone outside, she asked what it meant. Esmat did not know; some characters on the other side of the world, she supposed. It had been ordered by the artist to perpetuate his creation — a silly idea, she thought. " Cartoons are meant to be funny, I know, but what is there ridiculous about such abnormal beings as these are! I think they are hideous! " Again she cautioned them not to disturb the weavers.

It was a quiet group that went from rug to rug; only the words spoken by Esmat and the skilled weaver at the end of each plank were heard in the busy rooms.

Ali Naqi had no interest in the weaving; he seemed to see only the weavers. Wherever there was a little boy helping, he nudged his sister and the word for boy was formed on his lips when she turned toward him.

Ahmad studied Ali Naqi quietly. What notion did the boy have now? He could not figure it out. He trailed after the group, an interested spectator.

At length they had completed the inspection and come again to the big doorway by which they had entered the garden. Esmat said: " I have a few homes to visit near here today. Then I am going to see my sister for an hour. You may go to the Minaret now. Ahmad, be careful that they do not slip. The steps inside are so worn and old, it is easy to twist an ankle."

They agreed to be cautious.

Esmat watched them as they went off down the *kucheh* in the bright midmorning sunshine. " Youngsters of their age are busybodies, asking all kinds of questions in all sorts of places. It is a good thing I stopped them before they upset the weavers." She was talking half to herself, half to the gateman's wife, who stood at the entrance ready to bar the door after her departure. She paused as she was about to leave. " I think I will look again at that first room. They disturbed me so much I did not examine that rug as carefully as usual."

Secure in her adult wisdom, Esmat turned back into the big yard and disappeared a few minutes later in a long, dark corridor, a short cut to the room she wanted to revisit. At its end was the washroom used by the weavers.

At the entrance she paused a moment in order that her eyes might become accustomed to the darkness. As she started to walk on, she heard the sound of bare feet ahead of her. She could make out the shadowy figure of a child almost at the end of the corridor.

Suddenly a child's scream tore a jagged hole in her consciousness as the little figure before her disappeared from sight. The sound of terror ended as the sound of falling bricks ceased abruptly.

" What has happened? " she cried in alarm. She hurried cautiously forward toward the light at the end of the corridor, one hand touching the wall at her side. It was well that she walked carefully, for just before she reached the spot where she had seen the child disappear, a great hole yawned at her feet.

She backed away from it in fear as a sudden realization of what had happened swept over her. It might have happened to her had she come a minute sooner.

Kneeling on the floor, she called down the hole, " Are you hurt? "

There was no answer. Frantically she called again and again, then, trembling so that she could scarcely rise to her feet, she forced herself to stand, to turn away from the hole and fly back along the way she had entered.

" A child has fallen into a well! " she cried to the doorman, who with the gardener was seated enjoying a cup of tea.

Neither man had heard the scream; now they quickly barred the dark corridor at both ends while Esmat called the woman weaver from the room to find out whose child it was.

The woman had to return to check over the staring children before she could tell her. It was the little boy on the end whom Ali Naqi had interrogated.

" His mother is a widow, we think; anyway her husband deserted her. She weaves in the room across the garden." She started to go in that direction.

" Wait! Don't tell her! Not until noon anyway! " ordered Esmat. " Go back to your work; we must have men for this."

She hurried back to stand watching the lanterns being

lighted and placed at either side of the hole, which was almost as wide as the corridor itself.

The men began dragging timbers to lay carefully across the opening. As they did so, they talked excitedly together. " It will be impossible for us to do this alone," said one.

" We need rope, a bucket, and a well driller," said the other. " It is an old well — probably twenty or thirty feet deep."

Esmat felt nauseated as she remembered the little figure disappearing in the dim light; yet she took command. " Qassim, you go to the bazaar; get a well driller quickly."

The man dusted his hands on his knees as he arose.

Esmat turned to the other one. " Mehdi! Go tell Aga Mansur what has happened. Your wife and I will watch the door."

The two women barred the big wooden doors after the departing men. Esmat felt suddenly weak and faint. " Get me some tea! " she ordered as she sank, pale and trembling, on the doorstep of the gatehouse.

CHAPTER 31

THE LEANING MINARET IS A FAMOUS ANTIQUITY OF KASHAN. Tradition says that an earthquake caused its foundation to slip, leaving it slanting at a precarious angle. For centuries women have considered it a sacred place, and at almost any hour of the day some of them may be seen climbing it. The mud-brick steps are nearly knee-high and the stairway has many narrow openings which command an excellent view of the city, and, in the evenings, if the sky is clear and the dust cloud hovering over the horizon line has lifted, after sunset one may see Demavend, far in the distance. The stairway winds round and round like a corkscrew and the climbing women always throw their bad luck out of its windows as they pant and puff their way to the top. There, it is said, good luck comes to them when they leave bits of clothing tied to the railing while they make a wish — and their wishes are certain to be fulfilled in the near future.

Once many years ago the Government officials condemned the Minaret as unsafe. Workmen were sent to tear it down. They labored all one day loosening the bricks at the bottom with picks and crowbars. But the following morning they found that the women of Kashan had climbed the steep steps before dawn, each armed with some of the bricks that had been torn away from the base. The workmen stared up at the windows of the Minaret. In each one was framed a woman's veiled face and a hand with a brick in it.

The men consulted together as to the wisdom of proceeding with their task, but when one picked up a crowbar, a well-aimed brick knocked it from his hand. The women threatened to annihilate all of them if they tore down the beloved Minaret. They retreated, leaving the Minaret more unstable than

before, but even more precious to the women of Kashan.

For many more years the men had not dared to attempt its destruction. Only recently, however, it was again condemned, and the railed top and many feet of its height were removed and the brickwork at the top was leveled off. It was left leaning precariously as before and, even though it was much shorter than formerly, it was still taller than any other structure in Kashan.

The superstitions surrounding it had not lessened any more than had the perils of mounting it. For the stairs once filled with rubble, the women's ammunition, had become even more cluttered by the crumbling bricks. Their sides were all rounded and insecure; it was truly a feat of skill to maneuver one's way safely to the top.

The agile youngsters, Ali Naqi and his sisters, laughed and chattered over each differing view that they saw from the slit-like openings as they climbed. Ahmad followed more cautiously, warning them as they went up not to disturb the dirt so that it would fall on him.

At length all stood where they could view Kashan. It lay beneath them: a truly impressive city extending for a great distance on all sides. Excitedly they pointed out various places of interest and had them confirmed by their friend, their grandfather's former nazir.

They found the descent more arduous than the climb had been. Unused muscles rebelled at the steep steps and they found it more difficult to select a firm spot for their feet. Ahmad had insisted on leading them down and he called back to them again and again, cautioning them to greater care. When they reached the bottom, their legs were trembling.

When at length they arrived at home, they found Esmat had not yet returned. Concluding that she must have stayed for lunch at her sister's house, they decided to eat and have their usual siesta, for naturally their mother would take her afternoon rest before she returned.

After their naps, as they were drinking their afternoon tea, Ali Naqi remarked to his sisters, " I know what I will do tomorrow."

They were both interested; their brother thought of such exciting things to do these days. " What now? " Parvin asked.

" I'll get the little boys at the rug factory and teach them how to swim."

Parvin was enthusiastic. " There is a fine big pool in that garden. What fun for you! "

Ali Naqi continued, " Two days a week you can teach the girls."

Parvin looked surprised, but Effat answered for her. " Perhaps mother will not like it. She is the supervisor, you know."

Ali Naqi gave a laugh. " She can't stop me! Those children need exercise and sunshine. Didn't you see how pale and thin they were? "

He turned to Parvin for verification of his statement. She nodded her head. " I thought they looked half sick; and most of them looked unhappy too."

With her mother absent, Effat seemed to consider it her duty to defend the customs of Iran. " They are poor children. They need to work so they can earn money."

" Let them work; they'll work better if they feel better." Ali Naqi was emphatic in his rebuttal.

" Why shouldn't they feel well? They have their bread and greens and sour milk and cheese, with rice and meat gravy in the evening, and they rest after lunch. They always rest an hour after lunch." Effat argued with her brother. " They are just doing what Persians have always done."

" You're wrong! " Ali Naqi was most impressive in his seriousness and his certainty. " We never cared when we finished a rug. Some of our finest rugs took a generation to weave. But now we are trying to make money! " Again he turned to Parvin for confirmation. " Didn't mother say all those rugs had to be finished by fall and she had many more rush orders? "

His sister verified his statement.

" You see, Aga Danai, the Ostad, is right. Our world is at war because our foundations are wrong. That's one of our crooked foundations."

" What? What are you talking about? " Effat had lost the trend of his argument.

" Just like a woman! " said her brother. " You don't see the point."

She rose, saying as she did so: " You two! You would shake Iran to its very foundations like the former shah tried to do. You make me tired. It's almost six o'clock. I wonder why mother hasn't come."

" Sit down! Listen to me! " Ali Naqi was insistent. " We climbed the Minaret this morning, didn't we? Why is it slanting at such an angle? Its foundations have slipped! I maintain the foundations of Iran have slipped too. They are dangerous now. Those poor, unhealthy children will make unhappy men and women."

The two sisters looked at each other and their brother in astonishment at his wisdom. " Who told you that? " they asked simultaneously.

Ali Naqi's eyes sparkled as he repeated what he had said to Ahmad that very morning: " My teachers! Who else knows so much as they! "

The knocker on the door sounded. " It's mother! How glad I am! " said Effat as she saw her mother enter the door which the gardener had opened for her.

Esmat walked toward them with slow, uncertain steps.

Parvin jumped up. " Something's happened! " She rushed across the garden to her mother. " What is it? What has happened? " she cried.

Esmat passed her hand wearily across her eyes. " Let me sit down. Give me a drink," she begged of them.

The three helped her to the rug in the shade of the willow tree. They poured her a glass of tea while they looked at her in surprise. They talked among themselves. " What can have happened? " " Is she sick? " " Sunstroke! " answered practical Ali Naqi. " She's working too hard; plus the long walk in the heat."

" Bah! " said Effat. " More likely malaria! Her hands are cold as ice and she's chilling. Don't you see how she's trembling? "

Naneh appeared in the basement doorway. She gave her mistress a keen glance and hurried forward to sink on her knees

beside her. She gathered Esmat into her arms. " *Ya Allah!* She's grieving again! "

Esmat laid her head on her old woman's comfortable shoulder a moment, then she straightened up. " No! I am not sick! " Yet she continued to tremble as she spoke. " The floor of the hallway caved in; a child fell into a well — a little boy." She cleared her throat and reached for the tea Parvin was offering her.

Ali Naqi spoke quickly. " When did this happen? "

" Just after you left me. I went back to the first room and it happened that I saw him fall myself. I stayed until the well drillers got him out a while ago." She turned to her son. " He was the little boy you talked to."

" Was he alive? " asked Parvin.

" Thank God, yes. We sent for the doctor to be there when he was brought up."

" Well, then, why are you so pale and upset? " asked practical Effat. " After all, children often fall into wells in Iran. If he wasn't drowned, if he isn't dead, it's not so bad."

" No, he wasn't drowned — it happened the well was an old dry one — but he fell thirty feet on the bricks — " She paused and swallowed several sips of tea before she continued: " He was unconscious at first. Then he could not move. The doctor examined him very carefully." She cleared her throat and looked down at her feet before she added in a tone so low they could scarcely hear her: " He says his back is broken."

The three young folks looked at each other in horrified silence. Ali Naqi was the first to recover. He said: " That's not so bad as tuberculosis; a broken bone will heal in six weeks or so. We had a boy in school who fell in a well and broke a vertebra — he only missed two months of school."

Esmat shook with the nervous tremors of exhaustion. " The doctor — the doctor says — he was so thin, so anemic — the back may never heal because he may have some disease of the spine caused by lack — of sunshine."

" What doctor was this? " Ali Naqi spoke quickly.

" The Government doctor! The new one from the University of Iran. It's not like it was in the old days; this young

man knows. He examined him thoroughly, I told you."

"If he's Khosro Ataba, he does. The Ostad said he was a very competent young doctor."

"He is the same one," said Esmat. "And the boy's mother says death would be better than this."

"What a mother! Probably he can be cured of all his troubles; it will take more time, that's all." Ali Naqi turned to his sisters. "You see! It's just as I said; it's just what my scoutmaster told me: children have to have sunshine or they will get sick." He looked accusingly at his mother. "He was sick, only you didn't know it and made him keep on working."

Effat put her arm about her mother. "Ali Naqi says our foundations are not firm. That's why the well caved in." She had stumbled on a connecting point. "And even our poor children have a right to good health."

Esmat sighed. "I don't understand. I'm too tired to think. Naneh, get me some opium. I must sleep and forget this horror."

As Naneh rose to do her bidding, Ali Naqi rose also. "I want to talk to Dr. Ataba about that boy." He said to his sisters, "She must rest; she must be quiet."

When the garden door closed after their brother, the girls and Naneh turned to Esmat in alarm, for she had put her head in both hands and was crying with long, trembling sobs. They prepared a couch for her and persuaded her to lie down, then they put cold cloths on her forehead while Naneh took her shoes and stockings off and bathed her feet gently. She gave her the opium that Esmat had asked for, mixing a small quantity with the tea she gave her.

Gradually Esmat grew calmer; her sobs had ceased and she lay half dozing when Ali Naqi returned. He stood beside her a moment, watching her, then, as he saw she was awake, took her hand with an unaccustomed show of affection. "The doctor says you are not to worry, mother. Just rest and be quiet. He is quite certain the boy will get well. And it is not your fault, he says. This entire city was underlaid with robbers' tunnels and he has seen many accidents from those that caved in."

As they saw she was quiet at last, the children moved away

from her couch to the seats beneath the willow tree. Ali Naqi continued his account of his conversation with the doctor. " I told him about my plan to teach the little boys swimming this summer just as I was taught in the scout camp at Manzarieh. He said he would help me if I would start a little club among them and train them regularly. He's a fine man, that doctor! " His voice was full of enthusiasm as he continued to sing the doctor's praises. " He agreed with me that my teachers in Teheran were right — we have to think of others and strengthen our foundations so they will be firm and then we can build better than others have done."

As he talked on, his mother lay quietly listening. *He is right,* she thought; *they are both right. Wise men build only on a firm foundation of bedrock. But what is wrong with our foundations? I can't seem to think — to understand.* She tried to raise her head to look at her children sitting in the circle of light cast on them by the electric light hanging over the tree. The long, drooping branches covered with soft leaves threw quiet shadows over the group. Her head was so heavy, her eyes so tired, she seemed unable to see more than a blur and to be conscious of the murmur of their conversation as at a great distance.

She heard Ali Naqi saying: " I told him I had two sisters and they will help with the little girls too. You will, won't you? "

Parvin answered for them both: " We'll be glad to, if only you'll show us how. We want the children to be healthy and happy as much as you do! But we never went to a camp."

" That's all right, I can show you. It's only a matter of following the two greatest laws, my scoutmaster says."

" Laws? What laws must we follow? " Parvin was surprised.

" You know them; all the world knows them. The first is: Love God; the second: Love your neighbor as yourself. With these foundations one cannot fail."

" Who told him those laws? " asked Effat.

" He learned them from the Christian school he went to. He says it was Jesus, the Christ, whose picture you wove in your rug, who was the great Teacher."

Effat said: " Yes, the Koran says he was the Spirit of God — Ruh-o-Allah. But Mohammed came after him, almost six

hundred years later."

" Yes, that is true," said her brother. " He did, and whatever is good in the Koran can also be found in the Bible."

Esmat made a sound of protest. She tried to speak. " The Christians cured you — but you are a Mos — " Her voice died away as she realized the children were not there. *They are at supper, of course. I must have dozed — I did not hear them leave* — She raised her head and saw that the bed with its net was invitingly ready for her and that Naneh was sitting at her feet ready to help her. But she did not move until the children had returned and all of them went into the big mosquito net over the wooden bed above the still pool of water.

The children's unaccustomed exercise caused them to drop off into a sound slumber almost at once. But Esmat's nap had stimulated her thoughts. She seemed to be forever walking along the dark corridor, seeing the little form disappear, hearing the scream of terror echoing and re-echoing in her mind. At length, weary of turning and tossing, of blaming herself for the accident, for she had insisted only on testing the big garden, not the corridors at all, she crept quietly from beneath the big mosquito net.

She sought Naneh, sleeping soundly in the servants' corner of the garden. " Naneh! " She shook her gently. " Naneh! I am so tired, get me something so I can rest. I can't get to sleep again — "

Naneh sat up, rubbed her eyes sleepily, then got groaning to her feet. " There is plenty of opium; I got some yesterday; my rheumatism is so painful." She ambled off toward the house to return in a few minutes with a couple of white rolls in her hand. " I will mix up a sedative for you," said she, reaching for the lighted lantern.

But Esmat took the rolls from her and the lantern from near the head of her servant's bed. " I will do it; you go back to sleep."

Naneh obediently lay down, turned once, and was snoring almost immediately. *She has taken a dose herself,* thought Esmat as she walked away toward the house.

When she entered the dining room to look for a glass and

spoon, she turned up the wick of the lantern, set it on the table, then looked at the opium in her hand. " Naneh is getting old! How much she has given me! It is enough to kill a person — "

Suddenly she sat down in the chair beside the table. She cupped her face in her hands and stared wide-eyed at the opium before her.

Suicide! Would that not end all my troubles? Certainly it would end my mistakes! I am so tired of always trying — never succeeding. Why not end it all? She reached out a trembling hand to lift the drug to her lips.

Something seemed to draw it back as she recoiled involuntarily from the thought of death.

The little boy's face, still as death, rose before her. *If that child dies, it will kill me. I am to blame. I should have had the corridors tested. It is better to end my mistakes —*

Again she reached out her hand, but it lay inert, as if unable to lift the little roll of opium from the table. *My own children,* she thought, *what of them?* Time stood still, watching, waiting; only the moon moved slowly across the heavens, casting shadows where light had been and light on the opium before her. It seemed to stand out like a death's head as she thought of her daughters, her son. *The Ostad will train him better than I ever could — Parvin is ready for her classes in Teheran now; she must go this year surely. I can help her no longer. Effat must marry — who?* In a flash of memory she saw her adoring look at Captain Jangju and his answering interest in her youth and beauty. *He will not have forgotten — he will come back. He might tell his mother he wants me — but he will want children. I know I can never give him any — I have sinned and my sin will never leave me — I can never marry again — never again. No one needs me now. I can do nothing — nothing.*

This time, she came slowly to her decision; she reached out her hand for the third time, took the little roll, raised it to her lips, opened her mouth, put it in.

Then with a fearful retch she vomited it out violently. She dropped her head on her hands with a groan, crying out in an agony of remorse: " O God! If there is a God! Help me! Help me! O Holy Spirit of Allah! Ruh-o-Allah! If you heal this little

child I have injured so terribly, I will promise to search — to search anywhere, everywhere until I find you — "

The opium lay on the table where she had spat it out as she stumbled to her feet, grabbed the lantern, hurried across the moonlit garden to the bed over the pool. She never remembered crawling under the net with her children, so quickly slumber seized her. She sank deep into a well of unconsciousness which opened a bright channel that she seemed to be following on and on.

It was morning and she must hurry with her inspection, she must correct the mistakes the children were making. She began to climb up from the channel to reach the plank where the little boy who had fallen into the well was seated, weaving. He looked up from his work, and his face had the smiling eyes and the turned-up mouth of the boy in the rug Parvin had woven.

She said to him: " The people of Kashan want me to rebuild the Leaning Minaret. Will you help me? "

" We will build it together," he cried joyously.

Together they walked over to the Minaret. As soon as she saw it leaning so precariously, she realized that she would need dynamite to destroy it properly. She felt something in her hand and looked down to see a bomb ready for use. Carefully she placed it in a hole under the foundation, lighted the fuse, and hurried back to the boy who stood waiting for her at a safe distance.

They watched the Minaret rise and fall in ruins on its old base. As the dust cleared away, a Moslem grave yawned under the debris. Yet somehow it did not surprise her. Instinctively she knew that this was the real reason why the tower had slipped and that she herself must fill in that gaping hole before she could build anew. And she must do it quickly before the superstitious women of Kashan could prevent her. Graves must not be disturbed; but she had disturbed this one. She must fill it in quickly — she must! she must!

She began to cast stone upon stone into its depths. The little boy stood watching her. At length she looked around wearily and said to him: " It will take me a long, long time to make that ground firm enough. I can't do it alone."

" Let me help you! " he cried.

Like an echo of his words, she heard the voices of her own son and daughters saying, " We will help you too! "

She looked up and saw them coming toward her over the pile of dirt and bricks. They were not alone, either, for the Ostad who had helped her son so greatly, the young doctor with Parvin, and Effat with Captain Jangju were there also, eager to help her. Together they began to fill in the grave. Quickly it disappeared.

Then, like the miraculous mirages in the deserts of Iran, the scene changed suddenly. In place of the empty grave stood a fair new building with a beautiful tiled tower. The door in the wall stood invitingly open. They entered to find many clean, cool, well-lighted rooms around a beautiful courtyard with a blue-tiled pool in the center. They wandered from room to room. In each room they saw new rugs being woven.

Esmat studied the designs and recognized them to be the most difficult, the most perfect ones from all Iran, yet the weavers were only children, children with smiling eyes and lips that turned up at the corners like the one in the rug Parvin had woven, like the lad who was now by her side.

She turned to him and asked in surprise: " Can this be Kashan? It is not possible! Our children — so many of our children are sad, so many imperfect."

He replied in Parvin's words of long ago: " No children are perfect; but all can be happy. You made them smile; you built this house; you are in Kashan, Iran." He moved away from her as he said in farewell: " *Khoda Hafiz!* God keep you! "

" Don't go! Help me! Help me! My houses all fall down! I can't build alone. I am not wise enough." She sobbed aloud in agony and grabbed at a hand that touched hers.

But it was not the hand of the boy of the rug. It was her own son and her daughters shaking her gently.

" Mother! Wake up! You are having a nightmare! "

Esmat looked at her children in surprise.

" Did I call aloud? Did I waken you? " she asked. " It was no nightmare; it was a beautiful dream; I don't ever want to

forget it."

"Tell us! Tell us what it was!" they pleaded.

"I will tell you in the morning, I'm too sleepy now. Only I need your help — your help and His help, too. I have learned I cannot build alone. I must search, I must read father's books. I must find the Way, for my need is great."

She sank into a dreamless slumber.

She remembered her dream on the morrow.

She remembered her promise to search for the truth when the little boy recovered.

She never forgot it.

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